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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

SEPTEMBER  
1992

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by Kim Stanley Robinson

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**Address:** 217 Preston Drive,  
Brighton BN1 6FL, United  
Kingdom. All subscriptions,  
back-issue orders, general  
correspondence, books for review,  
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**Subscriptions:** £26 for one year (12  
issues) in the UK. Cheques or postal  
orders should be crossed and made  
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International Money Order. Pay-  
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may pay by dollar check - \$52 by  
Air Saver (accelerated surface  
mail). Lifetime subscriptions: £260  
(UK); £320 (overseas); \$520 (U.S.  
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**Back-issues** are available at £2.50  
each in the UK (£2.80 each over-  
seas), postage included. (US dollar  
price: \$5 surface mail.) All issues  
are still in print except numbers 1,  
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# interzone

## SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

No 63

September 1992

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### Cover by David Hardy for "Red Mars"

Published monthly.

All material is © Interzone, 1992

ISSN 0264-3596

Printed by KP Litho Ltd, Brighton

Trade distribution through Diamond Magazine  
Distribution Ltd., Unit 1,  
Burgess Rd., Ivyhouse Lane,  
Hastings, E. Sussex TN35 4NR  
(tel. 0424 430422)

Bookshop distribution through Central Books,  
99 Wallis Rd., London E9 5LN  
(tel. 081 896 4854)

U.S. and Canadian distribution through Worldwide  
Magazine Distributors Ltd., Unit 14 - 225 Bysham  
Park Drive, Woodstock, Ontario N4T 1P1,  
Canada (tel. 519 539 0200) - both trade  
and individual queries welcomed.



# Interface

## David Pringle

Yet again *Interzone* has been short-listed for a **Hugo Award**, in the category "Best Semi-Professional Magazine." (The main definition of "semi-professional," for those who are curious to know, is that it should be a magazine of less than 10,000 average circulation during the preceding calendar year.) The results, as voted by all those registered to attend, will be announced at the 50th World Science Fiction Convention, to be held in Orlando, Florida, in early September 1992. Our thanks to everyone who nominated *Interzone* this time around. The other magazines shortlisted in the same category are *Locus* (ed. Charles N. Brown), *New York Review of SF* (ed. David Hartwell et al), *Pulphouse* (ed. Dean Wesley Smith) and *Science Fiction Chronicle* (ed. Andrew Porter) — all of which are American publications. We confidently predict that *Locus* will win again, as it has done every year for the past decade or more.

And yet again the Hugo category of "Best Fan Writer" has its usual British representative, *IZ* columnist **David Langford**. The others nominated are Avedon Carol, Mike Glyer, Andrew Hooper, Evelyn Leeper and Harry Warner, Jr. In the fiction categories, from Best Novel through to Best Short Story, British (and for that matter non-American) names are notable for their complete absence. Indeed, in all the remaining categories there is just one British nominee: **Stephen Jones** is shortlisted for Best Non-Fiction Book (*Clive Barker's Shadows in Eden*).

### Hugo Grumbles

Although we are grateful for our nomination, we do feel that these Hugo (or "Science-Fiction Achievement") Awards are getting a little predictable: in some categories, the same nominees win year after year. Also, the categories themselves seem increasingly odd and inadequate. We have Best Semi-Professional Magazine, but there is no award for best Professional Magazine. We have Best Fan Writer, but no award for Best Critic or Non-Fiction Writer. Conversely, we have Best Professional Editor, but no award for Best Amateur (or Semi-Professional, or Fan) Editor. The "Best Semi-Prozine" category lumps together fiction magazines such as *Pulphouse* and *Interzone* with purely news magazines such as *Locus* and *SF Chronicle*.

Shouldn't there be a rethink of the structure of these awards? We'd be perfectly happy to see "semi-prozine" done away with altogether. Let's replace it with two new categories — Best Fiction Magazine and Best Non-Fiction Magazine. That way, *Interzone* will be in competition with *Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine*, *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, and so on. Meanwhile, *Locus*, *New York Review of SF* and others can compete with, say *Foundation* and *SF Studies* (two worthy journals which under the present system never get nominated). And wouldn't it be nice if there were a category in which regular critics and columnists like **John Clute** and **Nick Lowe** could compete against their American, Australian and other counterparts?

### Subscription Campaign Update

Our current campaign (see last issue's editorial for details) has now brought in almost 400 new subscriptions, at the time of writing. And they are still coming in, so we are well pleased. The majority of the new subscribers are readers of *New Scientist*, though we also got a pleasing response from the readership of the *London Review of Books* — and we are hopeful that the imminent mailing to subscribers of *Granta* will bring in many more.

None of this would have been possible without a special Incentive Funding grant from the Arts Council of Great Britain. The campaign was well timed, in that the effects of the economic recession had been eating into our subscription base and we had been about 300 subs down on the equivalent period last year. So this campaign has enabled us to make up the loss, and more. A warm welcome to all new readers. (David Pringle)

## Interaction

Dear Editors:

In response to the questions you pose in the editorial in *Interzone* 60, yes, I would like to see a new quality monthly or bimonthly magazine publishing short fantasy fiction.

However, *IZ* 60 was not intended to be a fantasy magazine but a "fantasy" issue of a magazine which is well

known for its fine, short sf, and demands to be judged as such. (Despite the "Science Fiction and Fantasy" subtitle, until recently the only honest fantasies have seemed to be extracts from big-name authors' forthcoming novels: e.g. from Terry Pratchett's *Wyrd Sisters* (*IZ* 26), and Michael Moorcock's "Elric: A Dragon Wakes" from *The Revenge of the Rose* (*IZ* 46).)

While I don't want to get bogged down in arguments about definitions, in order to properly criticize a "fantasy" issue of a "science-fiction" magazine, it's as well to be clear about how we may apply those labels and what we may mean by them... I would say that how far any story can be labelled "fantasy" (or "sf") can be assessed by its content or its tone or both.

Content is the easier to discuss: by this I mean not just the presence in a story of those fantastical (or science-fictional) elements (what John Clute would probably recognize as "genre tropes"), but also, and more importantly, how much those elements contribute to (i) the development and/or resolution of the story, or (ii) the reader's willingness to believe in the story (or at least, the willingness to suspend disbelief), or both.

To digress, somewhat whimsically, if we measure beauty in millihelens, perhaps we can measure the fantasy content of a story in millimoorcocks (or the sf content in millialdisses)!

Tone is trickier; it is a far more subjective measurement, this time of the author's point of view, attitude and approach to the material. If a story cannot be labelled "fantasy" by the criterion of content alone, it may still be a fantasy if the tone is appropriate. An sf example of this from a recent *Interzone* is Ian Watson's "The Coming of Vertumnus" in *IZ* 56: nothing in the content of this story was genuinely sf — notwithstanding David Pringle's reply to David Redd's letter in *IZ* 59, even the psychological, or "reality bending," drugs are very much the stuff of mainstream, mimetic fiction, or, as David Redd himself says, of 20th-century thrillers. However, it was the tone of the piece which did, I feel, qualify it as sf.

Michael Moorcock (in *Wizardry and Wild Romance*) suggests that fantasy is characterized by its manipulation of direct subconscious symbols and that a good fantasy story should be able to lead us to greater self-understanding —



indeed, I would say that any good story should. A similar statement could be made about science fiction... and Brian Aldiss (Trillion Year Spree) does so: "sf is the search for a definition of mankind and his [sic] status in the universe which will stand in our advanced but confused state of knowledge (science)..." These "definitions" turn on tone (rather than content): to generalize, fantasy's tone is more mythopoetic and psychological, sf's more scientific and sociological.

I would say that only three stories in *IZ* 60 were, by the criteria outlined above, fantasy; the other two were very much more sf – more than having just sf denouements, as David Pringle suggested in "Interface" – and wouldn't have seemed out of place in any other issue of *Interzone*.

Gary Kilworth's "The Sculptor" was an excellent piece, exceptional even for *Interzone*, a lovely outworking of a man's obsession in a fantastical alternative history, a fantasy by content and tone (e.g. the tower "of Babel" used literally and metaphorically).

Geoffrey A. Landis's "In the Land of Purple Flowers" developed much better than I'd anticipated after only the first page. I found the initial use of trite, superficial fantasy elements (e.g. the talking unicorn) somewhat off-putting (and quite superfluous to the development or resolution of the plot); however, perhaps there was false emphasis because the story appeared in this issue of *IZ*. Although Landis had a hard-sf rationale for this future Brigadoon, which allowed a thoughtful reflection on the development of humanity over the coming millennia (so qualifying as sf by both content and tone), the denouement was marred by the unnecessarily literal "one day in a hundred years" motif.

Brian Stableford's "The Unluckiest Thief" was a slight, but humorous, piece; it was no longer than it needed to be. However, he can write much better short fantasy than this, as most of his stories (under the pseudonym of Brian Craig) for GW Books' Warhammer anthologies attest: "The Phantom of Yremy," "The Light of Transfiguration," and, particularly, "A Gardener in Paravon."

Ken Wisman's "The Dumpster" was an amusing, light sf piece: the content was (to my mind) clearly sf; the tone perhaps harder to be confident about – humour, I guess, obscured the author's other intentions. Stories of this type would not be out of place in other issues of *IZ*, but I would rather have something more thought-provoking or funnier (or both).

Stephen Baxter's "The Orchards of the Moon" was a light but poignant story, rationally plotted (as one would expect from a hard-sf writer), but a fantasy on the strength of its content and, but to a lesser degree, its tone. (It was

also something of a hard-boiled detective story, scoring about 700 millichandlers.)

Interestingly, although the cover proclaims *IZ* 60 to be a "fantasy" issue, David Pringle's statement in "Interface" in *IZ* 58 was much less exclusive: "...a mainly fantasy issue (as was our issue 36 a couple of years ago)" [my emphasis]. I think this is much nearer the truth. If you had wanted *IZ* 60 to be a wholly fantasy issue, stories which appeared in very recent issues would have been better candidates than Landis's or Wisman's: e.g. Julian Flood's "The Jade Pool" (*IZ* 57), and Robert Irwin's "An Incident at the Monastery of Alcobaca" and Storm Constantine's "Priest of Hands" (both *IZ* 58).

Looking back at *IZ* 36, I notice that it claimed to contain "new tales of fantasy and horror." However, the only story which stands out as a genuine fantasy is Simon D. Ings's "The Braining of Mother Lamprey" (and this from the same Simon Ings who's written the "post-cyberpunk" *Hot Head?*).

The artwork in *IZ* 60 was the usual mixed bag. The cover art was, I felt, quite poor, rather trite and static (although the "snow-griffin" was a nice conceit), misleading as to the magazine's content, and unlikely to encourage newsstand sales. Kevin Cullen's artwork for "The Sculptor" was excellent, befitting his high placing in the readers' popularity poll. (I think that the only piece of Kevin's work I haven't liked was the cover art for *IZ* 57; his style seems far more suited to and effective in black and white.) Unfortunately, no other artwork was to my taste – a major weakness was the lack of anything by SMS, some of whose artwork, especially a cover, would have improved things considerably!

As far as the interviews go, I'm afraid none of them were of much interest to me because of the particular authors featured. On the other hand, I have very much enjoyed interviews with fantasy authors which have appeared in previous issues; e.g. Michael Moorcock (*IZ* 29), Terry Pratchett (*IZ* 25 and *Million* 5/*IZ* 51) and Tad Williams (*IZ* 49).

So, what kind of fantasy magazine would I like to see? Certainly, one with the same high production values as *Interzone*, and the same quality of fiction and comment. Editorially, however, I would like to see it publish more than just the light, upbeat fantasy fiction which David Pringle suggested in "Interface." I would hope for a less narrow approach, a mixture of all styles and moods encompassing epic fantasy (whether serious like Guy Gavriel Kay's and Tad Williams's or sardonic like Michael Moorcock's... but please, nothing pretentious!), dark fantasy (like Fritz Leiber's earlier "Fafhrd and Grey Mouser" tales, Mary Gentle's "Invisible College" stories,

and the better Warhammer fiction, such as Jack Yeovil's), humorous fantasy (like Terry Pratchett's "Discworld" stories), and so on.

A possible problem would be the overlap between the magazines' film and book review columns: *Interzone* now reviews both sf and fantasy. Would this change? i.e. would *IZ* review exclusively sf and the new magazine exclusively fantasy? Or would each review both but with a different emphasis and no overlap of titles reviewed?

The only recent professional magazine publishing fantasy fiction which I can recall was *Amaron*, which, unfortunately, folded after just two issues. Whatever the reason for this early demise, *Amaron* had (I think) two major faults: (i) the fiction which it published was not particularly good, and (ii) its editorial style was more like a gaming magazine's than a fiction magazine's. I do not believe that these are faults which a companion to *Interzone* should share.

Amongst fanzines, the one which most closely approaches the ideal is possibly *Scheherezade* (interestingly, also originating in Brighton). Although, as indicated by its subtitle, it publishes "Fantasy, Science Fiction and Gothic Romance," its sf stories have, I think, been its weakest, and the tone of the magazine as a whole seems to me more fantasy than sf. Certainly, the majority of the fantasy stories it has published have been very fine.

Perhaps, if I can make a presumptuous suggestion, *Scheherezade* could be more than just a model for a companion to *Interzone*: you may wish to consider publishing it as a joint venture with the *Counihans*; you could benefit from their magazine's established (albeit small) readership and subscription base, and the *Counihans* from your established production, marketing and distribution structure.

However you can bring it about, I do hope that a fantasy companion to *IZ* does appear in the future... and sooner rather than later. (But what would it be called? *Amaron* and *Scheherezade* both feel right for a fantasy magazine, but I can't think of anything similarly evocative.) Even if a new magazine doesn't appear, I wish you continued success with *Interzone* itself: I for one hope to be reading *IZ* 120 or even *IZ* 600!

**Dr Anthony R. Allan**  
Horrogate, N. Yorks.

**Editor:** Many thanks for all your carefully considered comments and suggestions. We have no definite plans for a fantasy magazine at present, but maybe someone, somewhere, will feel inspired to go into partnership with us...

Continued on page 35

# Red Mars

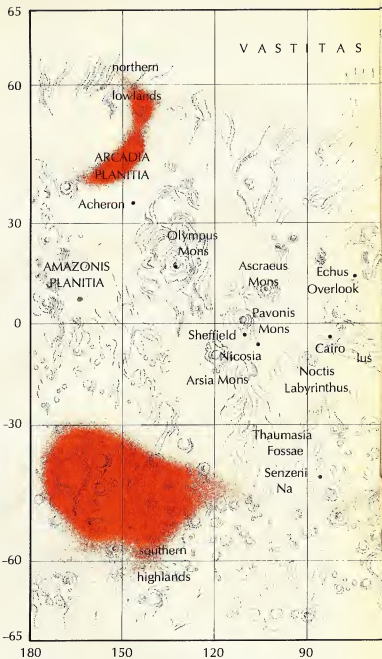
**T**heir dirigible was the biggest ever made, a planetary model built back in Germany by Friedrichshafen Nach Einmal, and shipped up in 2029, so that it had just recently arrived. It was called the Arrowhead, and it measured 120 metres across the wings, 100 metres front to back, and 40 metres tall. It had an internal ultralite frame, and turboprops at each wingtip and under the gondola; these were driven by small plastic engines whose batteries were powered by solar cells arrayed on the upper surface of the bag. The pencil-shaped gondola extended most of the length of the underside, but it was smaller inside than Nadia had expected, because much of it was temporarily filled with their cargo of windmills; at takeoff their clear space consisted of nothing more than the cockpit, two narrow beds, a tiny kitchen, an even smaller toilet, and the crawlspace necessary to move among these. It was pretty tight, but happily both sides of the gondola were walled with windows, and though somewhat blocked by windmills these still gave them a lot of light, and good visibility.

Takeoff was slow. Arkady released the lines extending from the three mooring masts with the flip of a cockpit toggle; the turboprops ran hard, but they were dealing with air that was only twelve millibars thick. The cockpit bounced up and down in slow motion, flexing with the internal frame; and every up bounce was a little higher off the ground. For someone used to rocket launches it was comical.

"Let's take a three-sixty and see Underhill before we go," Arkady said when they were fifty metres high. He banked the ship and they made a slow wide turn, looking out Nadia's window. Tracks, pits, mounds of regolith, all dark red against the dusty orange surface of the plain – it looked as if a dragon had reached down with a great taloned claw, and drawn blood time after time. Underhill sat at the centre of the wounds, and by itself was a pretty sight, a square dark red setting for a shiny glass-and-silver jewel, with green just visible under the dome. Extending away from it were the roads east to Chernobyl and north to the spacepads. And over there were the long bulbs of the greenhouses, and there was the trailer park...

"The Alchemists' Quarter still looks like something out of the Urals," Arkady said. "We really have to do something about that." He brought the dirigible out of its turn and headed east, moving with the wind. "Should I run us over Chernobyl and catch the updraft?"

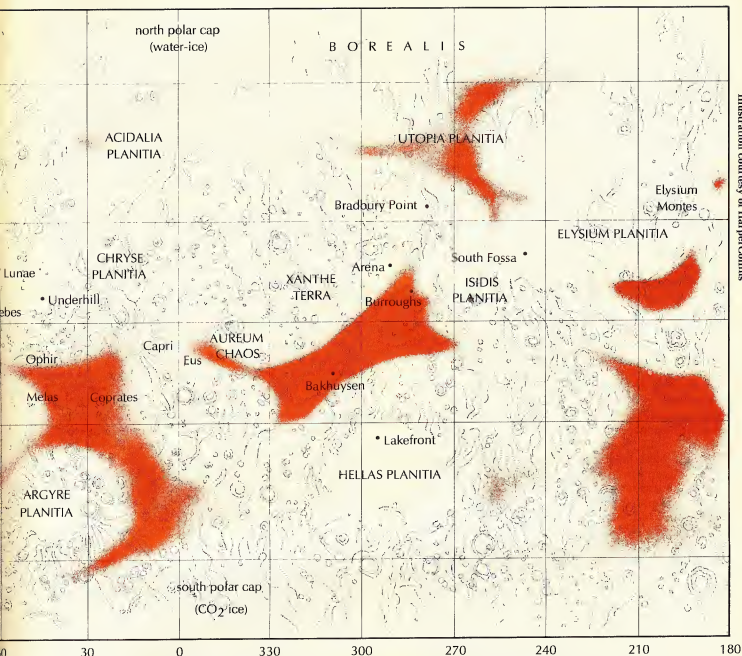
"Why don't we see what this thing can do unassisted?" Nadia said. She felt light, as if the hydrogen



in the ballonets had filled her as well. The view was stupendous, the hazy horizon perhaps a hundred kilometres away, the contours of the land all clearly visible: the subtle bumps and hollows of Lunae, the more prominent hills and canyons of the channelled terrain to the east. "Oh, this is going to be wonderful!"

"Yes."

It was remarkable, in fact, that they had not done anything like this before. But flying on Mars was no easy thing, because of the thin atmosphere. They were in the best solution: a dirigible as big and light as possible, filled with hydrogen, which in Martian air was not only not flammable, but also even lighter relative to its surroundings than it would have been on Earth. Hydrogen and the latest in superlight materials gave them the necessary lift to carry a cargo like their windmills, but with such a cargo aboard they were ludicrously sluggish, and everything happened in extreme slow motion.



## Kim Stanley Robinson

And so they drifted along. All that day they crossed the rolling plain of Lunae Planum, pushed southeast by the wind. For an hour or two they could see Juventa Chasm on the southern horizon, a gash of a canyon that looked like a giant pit mine. Farther east, the land turned yellowish; there was less surface rubble, and the underlying bedrock was more rumpled. There were also many more craters, craters big and small, crisp-rimmed or nearly buried. This was Xanthe Terra, a high region that was topographically similar to the southern uplands, here sticking into the north between the low plains of Chryse and Isidis. They would be over Xanthe for some days, if the prevailing westerlies held true.

They were progressing at a leisurely 10 kph. Most

of the time they flew at an altitude of about a hundred metres, which put the horizons about fifty kilometres away. They had time to look closely at anything they wanted to, although Xanthe was proving to be little more than a steady succession of craters.

Late that afternoon Nadia tilted the nose of the dirigible down and circled into the wind, dropping until they were within ten metres of the ground and then releasing their anchor. The ship rose, jerked on its line, and settled downwind of the anchor, tugging at it like a fat kite. Nadia and Arkady twisted down the length of the gondola, to what Arkady called the bomb bay. Nadia lifted a windmill onto the bay's winch hook. The windmill was a little thing, a magnesium box with four vertical vanes on a rod projecting from its top. It weighed about five kilos. They closed the

bay door on it, sucked out the air, and opened the bottom doors. Arkady operated the winch, looking through a low window to see what he was doing. The windmill dropped like a plumb, and bumped onto hardened sand, on the southern flank of a small unnamed crater. He released the winch hook, reeled it back into the bay and closed the bomb doors.

They returned to the cockpit, and looked down again to see if the windmill was working. There it stood, a small box on the outside slope of a crater, somewhat tilted, the four broad vertical blades spinning merrily. It looked like an anemometer from a kid's meteorology kit. The heating element, an exposed metal coil that would radiate like a stovetop, was on one side of the base. In a good wind the element might get up to 200° Centigrade, which wasn't bad, especially in that ambient temperature. Still... "It's going to take a lot of those to make any difference," Nadia remarked.

"Sure, but every little bit helps, and in a way it's free heat. Not only the wind powering the heaters, but the sun powering the factories making the windmills. I think they're a good idea."

They stopped once more that afternoon to set out another one, then anchored for the night in the lee of a crisp young crater. They microwaved a meal in the tiny kitchen, and then retired to their narrow bunks. It felt odd to rock on the wind, like a boat at its mooring; tug and float, tug and float. But it was very relaxing when you got used to it, and soon Nadia was asleep.

**T**he next morning they woke before dawn, cast off, and motored up into the sunlight. From a hundred metres height they could watch the shadowed landscape below turn to bronze as the terminator rolled by and clear daylight followed, illuminating a fantastic jumble of bright rocks and long shadows. The morning wind pushed right to left across their bow, so they were pushed northeast toward Chryse, humming along with the props on full power. Then the land fell away below them, and they were over the first of the outflow channels they would pass, a sinuous unnamed valley west of Shalbatana Vallis. This little arroyo's S shape was unmistakably water-cut. Later that day they lofted out over the deeper and much wider canyon of Shalbatana, and the signs were even more obvious: tear-shaped islands, curving channels, alluvial plains, scablands; there were signs everywhere of a massive flood, a flood that had created a canyon so huge that the Arrowhead suddenly looked like a butterfly.

The outflow canyons and the high land between them reminded Nadia of the landscape of American cowboy movies, with washes and mesas and isolated ship rocks, as in Monument Valley – except here it lasted for four days, as they passed in succession over the unnamed channel, Shalbatana, Simud, Tiu, and then Ares. All of them had been caused by giant floods, which had burst onto the surface and flowed for months, at rates ten thousand times that of the Mississippi. Nadia and Arkady talked about that as they looked down into the canyons under them, but it was very hard to imagine floods so huge. Now the big empty canyons funnelled nothing but wind. They did that quite well, however, so Arkady and Nadia descended into them a number of times per day, to

drop more windmills.

Then east of Ares Vallis they floated back over the densely cratered terrain of Xanthe. Again the land was everywhere marred by craters: big craters, little craters, old craters, new craters, craters with rims marred by newer craters, craters with floors punctured by three or five smaller craters; craters as fresh as if they had struck yesterday; craters that just barely showed, at dawn and dusk, as buried arcs in the old plateau. They passed over Schiaparelli, a giant old crater a hundred kilometres across; when they floated over its central uplift knob, its crater walls formed their horizon, a perfect ring of hills around the edge of the world.

After that the winds blew from the south for several days. They caught a glimpse of Cassini, another great old crater, and passed over hundreds of smaller ones. They dropped several windmills per day, but the flight was giving them a stronger sense of the size of the planet, and the project began to seem like a joke, as if they flew over Antarctica and tried to melt the ice by setting down a number of camping stoves. "You'd have to drop millions to make any difference," Nadia said as they climbed up from another drop.

"True," Arkady said. "But Sax would like to drop millions. He's got an automated assembly line that will just keep churning them out, it's only distribution that is a problem. And besides, it's just one part of the campaign he has in mind." He gestured back toward the last arc of Cassini, inscribing the whole northwest. "Sax would like to bang out a few more holes like that one. Capture some icy moonlets from Saturn, or from the asteroid belt if he can find any, and push them back and smash them into Mars. Make hot craters, melt the permafrost – they'd be like oases."

"Dry oases, wouldn't they be? You'd lose most of the ice on entry, and have the rest disappear on contact."

"Sure, but we can use more water vapour in the air."

"But it wouldn't just vaporize it, it would break into its constituent atoms."

"Some of it. But hydrogen and oxygen, we could use more of both."

"So you're bringing hydrogen and oxygen from Saturn? Come on, there's lots of both here already! You could just break down some of the ice."

"Well, it's just one of his ideas."

"I can't wait to hear what Ann says to that." She sighed, thought about it. "The thing to do, I suppose, would be to graze an ice asteroid through the atmosphere, as if trying to aerobreak it. That would burn it up without breaking the molecules apart. You'd get water vapour in the atmosphere, which would help, but you wouldn't be bombing the surface with explosions as big as a hundred hydrogen bombs going off all at once."

Arkady nodded. "Good idea! You should tell Sax."

"You tell him."

**E**ast of Cassini the terrain grew rougher than ever. This was some of the oldest surface on the planet, cratered to saturation in the earliest years of torrential bombardment. A hellish age, the Noachian, you could see that in the landscape. A No Man's Land from a Titanic trench war, the sight of



it induced a kind of numbness after a while, a cosmological shell shock.

They floated on, east, northeast, southeast, south, northeast, west, east, east. They finally came to the end of Xanthe, and began to descend the long slope of Syrtis Major Planitia. This was lava plain, much less densely cratered than Xanthe. The land sloped down and down, until finally they drifted over a smooth-floored basin: Isidis Planitia, one of the lowest points on Mars. It was the essence of the northern hemisphere, and after the southern highlands it seemed especially smooth and flat and low. And it too was a very large region. There really was a lot of land on Mars.

Then one morning when they lofted up to cruising altitude, a trio of peaks rose over the eastern horizon. They had come to Elysium, the only other Tharsis-like "bulge continent" that the planet had. Elysium was a much smaller bulge than Tharsis, but it was still big, a high continent, one thousand kilometres long and ten kilometres taller than the surrounding terrain. As with Tharsis, it was ringed by patches of fractured land, crack systems caused by the uplift. They flew over the westernmost of these crack systems, Hecates Fossae, and found the area an unearthly sight: five long deep parallel canyons, like claw marks in the bedrock. Elysium loomed beyond, a saddleback in shape, Elysium Mons and Hecates Tholus rearing at each end of a long spine range, five thousand metres higher than the bulge they punctuated: an awesome sight. Everything about Elysium was so much bigger than anything Nadia and Arkady had seen so far that as the dirigible floated toward the range, the two were speechless for minutes at a time. They sat in their seats, watching it all float slowly toward them. When they did speak, it was just thinking aloud: "Looks like the Karakorum," Arkady said. "Desert Himalayas. Except these are so simple. Those volcanoes look like Fuji. Maybe people will hike up them someday in pilgrimages."

Nadia said, "These are so big, it's hard to imagine what the Tharsis volcanoes will look like. Aren't the Tharsis volcanoes twice as big as these?"

"At least. It does look like Fuji, don't you think?"

"No, it's a lot less steep. Why, did you ever see Fuji?"

"No."

After a while: "Well, we'd better try to go around the whole damn thing," Arkady said. "I'm not sure we have the loft to get over those mountains."

So they turned the props, and pushed south as hard as they could, and the winds naturally co-operated, as they were curving around the continent too. So the Arrowhead floated southeast into a rough mountainous region called Cerberus; and all of the next day they could mark their progress by the sight of Elysium, passing slowly to their left. Hours passed, the massif shifted in their side windows; the slowness of the shift made it plain just how big this world was. Mars has as much land surface as the Earth — everyone always said that, but it had been just a phrase. Their creep around Elysium was the proof of the senses.

**T**he days passed: up in the frigid morning air, over the jumbled red land, down in the sunset, to bounce at an airy anchorage. One evening when the supply of windmills had dwindled they

rearranged those that remained, and moved their beds together under the starboard windows. They did it without discussion, as if it had been the obvious thing to do when they had room; as if they had already agreed to do it long before. And as they moved around the cramped gondola rearranging things, they bumped into each other just as they had all trip long, but now intentionally, and with a sensuous rubbing which accentuated what they had been up to all along, accidents became foreplay; and finally Arkady burst out laughing and caught her up into a wild bear hug, and Nadia shouldered him back onto their new double bed and they kissed like teenagers, and made love through the night. And after that they slept together, and made love frequently in the ruddy glow of dawn and in the starry black nights, with the ship lightly bobbing at its moorings. And they lay together talking, and the sensation of floating as they embraced was palpable, more romantic than any train or ship.

"We became friends first," Arkady said once, "that's what makes this different, don't you think?" He prodded her with a finger. "I love you." It was as if he were testing the words with his tongue. It was clear to Nadia that he hadn't said them often; it was clear they meant a lot to him, a kind of commitment. Ideas meant so much to him! "And I love you," she said.

And in the mornings Arkady would pad up and down the narrow gondola naked, his red hair bronzed like everything else by the horizontal morning light, and Nadia would watch from their bed feeling so serene and happy that she had to remind herself that the floating sensation was probably just Martian g. But it felt like joy.

One night as they were falling asleep Nadia said curiously, "Why me?"

"Huh?" He had been almost asleep.

"I said, why me? I mean, Arkady Nikelyovich, you could have loved any of the women here, and they would have loved you back. You could have had Maya if you wanted."

He snorted. "I could have had Maya! Oh my! I could have had the joy of Maya Katarina! Just like Frank and John!" He snorted, and they both laughed out loud. "How could I have passed on such joy! Silly me!" He giggled until she punched him.

"All right, all right. One of the others then, the beautiful ones, Janet or Ursula or Samantha."

"Come on," he said. He propped himself up on an elbow to look at her. "You really don't know what beauty is, do you?"

"I certainly do," Nadia said mulishly.

Arkady ignored her and said, "Beauty is power and elegance, right action, form fitting function, intelligence, and reasonability. And very often," he grinned and pushed at her belly, "expressed in curves."

"Curves I've got," Nadia said, pushing his hand away.

He leaned forward and tried to bite her breast, but she dodged him.

"Beauty is what you are, Nadezhda Francine. By these criteria you are queen of Mars."

"Princess of Mars," she corrected absently, thinking it over.

"Yes, that's right. Nadezhda Francine Cherneshevsky, the nine-fingered Princess of Mars."

"You're not a conventional man."

"No!" He hooted. "I never claimed to be! Except before certain selection committees of course. A conventional man! Ha, ha ha ha ha ha! — the conventional men get Maya. That is their reward!" And he laughed like a wild man.

One morning they crossed the last broken hills of Cerberus, and floated out over the flat dusty plain of Amazonis Platonis. Arkady brought the dirigible down, to set a windmill in a pass between two final hillocks of old Cerberus. Something went wrong with the clasp on the winch hook, however, and it snapped open when the windmill was only halfway to the ground. The windmill thumped down flat on its base. From the ship it looked okay, but when Nadia suited up and descended in the sling to check it out, she found that the hot plate had cracked away from the base.

And there, behind the plate, was a mass of something. A dull green something, with a touch of blue to it, dark inside the box. She reached in with a screwdriver and poked at it carefully. "Shit," she said.

"What?" Arkady said above.

She ignored him and scraped some of the substance into a bag she used for screws and nuts.

She got into the sling. "Pull me back up," she ordered.

"What's wrong?" Arkady asked.

"Just get me up there."

He closed the bomb bay doors after her, and met her as she was getting out of the sling. "What's up?"

She took off her helmet. "You know what's up, you bastard!" She took a swing at him and he leaped back, banging into a wall of windmills. "Ow!" he cried; a vane had caught him in the back. "Hey! What's the problem! Nadia!"

She took the bag from her walker pocket and waved it before him. "This is the problem! How could you do it? How could you lie to me? You bastard, do you have any idea what kind of trouble this is going to get us in? They'll come up here and send us all back to Earth!"

Round-eyed, Arkady rubbed his jaw. "I wouldn't lie to you, Nadia," he said earnestly. "I don't lie to my friends. Let me see that."

She stared at him and he stared back, his arm stretched out for the bag, the whites of his eyes visible all the way round the irises. He shrugged, and she frowned.

"You really don't know?" she demanded.

"Know what?"

She couldn't believe he would fake ignorance; it just wasn't his style. Which suddenly made things very strange. "At least some of our windmills are little algae farms."

"What?"

"The fucking windmills that we've been dropping everywhere," she said. "They're stuffed with Vlad's new algae or lichen or whatever it is. Look." She put the little bag on the tiny kitchen table, opened it and used the screwdriver to spoon out a bit of it. Little knobby chunks of bluish lichen. Like Martian life forms out of an old pulp novel.

They stared at it.

"Well I'll be damned," Arkady said. He leaned over until his eyes were a centimetre from the stuff on the table.

"You swear you didn't know?" Nadia demanded.

"I swear. I wouldn't do that to you, Nadia. You know that."

She heaved a big breath. "Well — our friends would do it to us, apparently."

He straightened up and nodded. "That's right." He was distracted, thinking hard. He went to one of the windmill bases and hefted it away from the others. "Where was it?"

"Behind the heating pad."

They went to work on it with Nadia's tools, and got it open. Behind the plate was another colony of Underhill algae. Nadia poked around at the edges of the plate, and discovered a pair of small hinges where the top of the plate met the insides of the container wall. "Look, it's made to open."

"But who opens it?" Arkady said.

"Radio?"

"Well I'll be damned." Arkady stood, walked up and down the narrow corridor. "I mean —"

"How many dirigible trips have been made so far, ten? Twenty? And all of them dropping these things?"

Arkady started to laugh. He tilted his head back, and his huge crazed grin split his red beard in two, and he laughed until he held his sides. "Ah, ha ha ha ha ha ha!"

Nadia, who didn't think it was funny at all, nevertheless felt her face grinning at the sight of him. "It's not funny!" she protested. "We're in big trouble!"

"Maybe," he said.

"Definitely! And it's all your fault. Some of those fool biologists in the trailer part took your anarchist rant seriously!"

"Well," he said, "that at least is a point in their favour, the bastards. I mean —" he went back to the kitchen table to stare at the clump of blue stuff — who exactly do you think we're talking about, anyway? How many of our friends are in on this? And why in the world didn't they tell me?"

This really rankled, she could tell. In fact the more he thought about it, the less amused he was, because the algae meant there was a subculture in their group that was acting outside UNOMA supervision but had not let Arkady in on it, even though he had been the first and most vocal advocate of such subversion. What did that mean? Were there people who were on his side but didn't trust him? Were there dissidents with a competing programme?

They had no way of telling. Eventually they pulled anchor, and sailed on over Amazonis. They passed a medium-sized crater named Pettit, and Arkady remarked that it would make a good site for a windmill, but Nadia only snarled. They flew by, talking the situation over. Certainly several people in the bioengineering labs had to be in on it; probably most of them; maybe all. And then Sax, the designer of the windmills, certainly had to be a part of it. And Hiroko had been an advocate of the windmills, but they had neither been sure why; it was impossible to judge whether she would approve of something like this or not, as she was simply too close with her opinions. But it was possible.

As they talked it over, they took the broken windmill completely apart. The heating plate doubled as a gate for the compartment containing the algae; when the gate opened, the algae

would be released into an area that would be a bit warmer because of the hot plate itself. Each windmill thus functioned as a micro-oasis, and if the algae managed to survive with its help, and then grow beyond the small area warmed by the hot plate, then good. If not it was not going to do very well on Mars anyway. The hot plate served to give it a good sendoff, nothing more. Or so its designers must have thought. "We've been made into Johnny Appleseed," Arkady said.

"Johnny what?"

"American folk tale." He told her about it.

"Yeah, right. And now Paul Bunyon is going to come kick our ass."

"Ha. Never. Big Man is much bigger than Paul Bunyon, believe me."

"Big Man?"

"You know, all those names for landscape features. Big Man's Footprints, Big Man's Bathtub, Big Man's Golf Course, whatever."

"Ah yeah."

"Anyway, I don't see why we should get into trouble. We didn't know anything about it."

"Now who's going to believe that?"

"...Good point. Those bastards, they really got me with this one."

Clearly this was what bothered Arkady most. Not that they had contaminated Mars with alien biota, but that he had been kept out of a secret. Men were such egomaniacs when it came down to it. And Arkady, he had his own group of friends, perhaps more than that: people who agreed with him, followers of a sort. The whole Phobos crew, a lot of the programmers in Underhill. And if some of his own people were keeping things from him, that was bad; but if another group had secret plans of its own, that was worse, apparently, because they were at least interference, and perhaps competition.

Or so he seemed to think. He wouldn't say much of this explicitly, but it became obvious in his mutterings, and his sudden sharp curses which were genuine even though they alternated with bursts of hilarity. He couldn't seem to make up his mind whether he was pleased or angry, and Nadia finally believed that he was both at once. That was Arkady: he felt things freely and to the full, and wasn't much worried about consistency. But she wasn't too sure she liked his reasons this time, for either his anger or his amusement, and she told him so with considerable irritation.

"Well, but come on!" he cried. "Why should they keep it a secret from me, when it was my idea to begin with?"

"Because they knew I might come along with you. If they told you, you would have had to tell me. And if you told me, I would have stopped it!"

Arkady laughed outrageously at this. "So it was pretty considerate of them after all!"

"Fuck."

The bioengineers, Sax, the people in the Quarter who had actually constructed the things. Someone in communications, probably – there were quite a few who must have known.

"What about Hiroko?" Arkady asked.

They couldn't decide. They didn't know enough of her views to be able to guess what she might think. Nadia was pretty sure she was in on it, but couldn't

explain why. "I suppose," she said, thinking about it. "I suppose I feel like there is this group around Hiroko, the whole farm team and a fair number of others, who respect her and – follow her. Even Ann, in a way. Although Ann will hate this when she hears about it! Whew! Anyway, it just seems to me that she would know about anything secret going on. Especially something having to do with ecological systems. The bioengineering group works with her most of the time, after all, and for some of them she's like a guru, they almost worship her. They probably got her advice when they were splicing the algae together!"

"Hmm..."

"So they probably got her agreement for the idea. Maybe I should even say her permission."

Arkady nodded. "I see your point."

On and on they talked, hashing over every point of it. The land they passed over, flat and immobile, looked different to Nadia now. It was seeded, fertilized; it was going to change, now, inevitably. They talked about the other parts of Sax's terraforming plans, giant orbiting mirrors reflecting sunlight onto the dawn and dusk terminators, carbon distributed over the polar caps, areothermal heat, the ice asteroids. It was all really going to happen, it seemed. The debate had been bypassed; they were going to change the face of Mars.

**T**he second evening after their momentous discovery, as they were cooking dinner at a crater's lee anchorage, they got a call from Underhill, relayed off one of the comm satellites. "Hey you two!" John Boone said by way of greeting. "We've got a problem!"

"You've got a problem," Nadia replied.

"Why, something wrong out there?"

"No no."

"Well good, because really it's you guys who have the problem, and I wouldn't want you to have more than one! A dust storm has started down in the Claritas Fossae region, and it's growing, and coming north at a good rate. We think it'll reach you in a day or so."

"Isn't it early for dust storms?" Arkady asked.

"Well no, we're at Ls = 240, which is pretty much the usual season for it. Southern spring. Anyway, there it is, and it's coming your way."

He sent a satellite photo of the storm, and they studied their TV screen closely. The region south of Tharsis was now obscured by an amorphous yellow cloud.

"We'd better take off for home right now," Nadia said after studying the photo.

"At night?"

"We can run the props on batteries tonight, and recharge the batteries tomorrow morning. After that we may not have much sunlight, unless we can get above the dust."

After some discussion with John, and then with Ann, they cast off. The wind was pushing them east-northeast, and on this heading they would pass just to the south of Olympus Mons. After that their hope was to get around the north flank of Tharsis, which would protect them from the dust storm for at least a while.

It seemed louder flying at night. The wind's rush

over the fabric of the bag was a fluctuating moan, the sound of their engines a pitiful little hum. They sat in the cockpit, lit only by dim green instrument lights, and talked in low voices as they moved over the black land below. They had about three thousand kilometres to go before reaching Underhill; that was about three hundred hours of flying time. If they went round the clock, it would be twelve days or so. But the storm, if it grew in the usual pattern, would reach them long before then. After that – it was hard to tell how it would go. Without sunlight the props would drain the batteries, and then – “Can we just float on the wind?” Nadia said. “Use the props for occasional directional nudges?”

“Maybe. But these things are designed with the props as part of the lift, you know.”

“Yeah.” She made coffee and brought mugs of it up to the cockpit. They sat and drank, and looked out at the black landscape, or the green sweep of the little radar screen. “We probably ought to drop everything we don’t need. Especially those damned windmills.”

“It’s all ballast, save it for when we need the lift.”

The hours of the night wore on. They traded shifts at the helm, and Nadia caught an uneasy hour’s sleep. When she returned to the cockpit, she saw that the black bulk of Tharsis had rolled over the horizon ahead of them: the two northernmost of the three prince volcanoes, Asdraeus Mons and Pavonis Mons, were visible as humps of occluded stars, out at the edge of the world. To their left Olympus Mons still bulked well above the horizon, and taken with the other two volcanoes, it looked as if they flew low in some truly gigantic canyon. The radar screen reproduced the view in miniature, in green lines on the screen’s gridwork.

Then, in the hour before dawn, it seemed as though another massive volcano were rising behind them. The whole southern horizon was lifting, low stars disappearing as they watched, Orion drowned in black. The storm was coming.

**I**t caught them just at daybreak, choking off the red in the eastern sky, rolling over them, returning the world to rusty darkness. The wind picked up until it swept past the gondola windows in a muted roar, and then with a loud howling; dust flew by them with terrifying, surreal speed. Then the wind grew even more violent, and the gondola jerked up and down as the frame of the dirigible was twisted back and forth.

They were lucky north was the direction they wanted to go. At one point Arkady said, “The wind should hopefully wrap around the north shoulder of Tharsis.”

Nadia nodded silently. They hadn’t gotten the chance to recharge the batteries after the night’s flight, and without sunlight the motors wouldn’t run too much longer. “Hiroko told me sunlight on the ground during a storm is supposed to be about fifteen percent of normal,” she said. “Higher there should be more. So we’ll get some recharge, but it’ll be slow. Could be that over the course of the day we might get enough to use the props a bit tonight.” She flicked on a computer to do the calculations. Something in the expression on Arkady’s face – not fear, not even anxiety, but a curious little smile – made her aware of how much

danger they were in. If they couldn’t use the props, they wouldn’t be able to direct their movement, and they might not even be able to stay aloft. They could descend, it was true, and try to anchor; but they had only a few weeks’ more food, and storms like these often persisted for two months, sometimes three.

“There’s Asdraeus Mons,” Arkady said, pointing at the radar screen. “Good image.” He laughed. “Best view of it we’re going to get this time around, I’m afraid. Too bad, I was really looking forward to seeing them! Remember Elysium?”

“Yeah yeah,” Nadia said, busy running simulations of the batteries’ efficiency. Daily sunlight was near its perihelion peak, which was what the storm had started in the first place; and the instruments said that about twenty percent of full daylight was penetrating to this level (it felt to her eye more like thirty or forty); therefore it might be possible to run the props half the time, which would help tremendously. Without them they were moving at around twelve kilometres per hour, and losing altitude as well, although that might be the ground rising under them. With their props they might be able to hold a steady altitude, and influence their course by a degree or two.

“How thick is the dust, do you think?”

“How thick?”

“You know, grammes per cubic metre. Try to get Ann or Hiroko on the radio and find out, will you?”

She went back to see what they had on board that could be used to power the props. Hydrazine, for the bomb bay vacuum pumps; the pump motors could be wired to the props, probably... She was kicking one of the damned windmills out of the way when she stared at it. The hot plates were heated by an electric charge generated by the spinning of the windmills. So if she could run that charge into the prop batteries, the windmills could be attached to the outside of the gondola, and this wind would spin them like tops, and the resulting electricity could help power the props. As she rooted through the equipment locker looking for wire and transformers and tools she told Arkady the idea, and he laughed his madman laugh. “Good idea, Nadia! Great idea!”

“If it works.” She rummaged through the tool kit, sadly smaller than her usual supply. The light in the gondola was eerie, a dim yellow glow flickering with every gust. The view out the side windows shifted from pockets of complete clarity, with thick yellow clouds like thunderheads flying past them, to complete obscurity, all the window surfaces streaming with dust that flashed by at well over three hundred kilometres per hour. Even at twelve millibars the blast of the wind was tossing the dirigible about; up in the cockpit Arkady was cursing the autopilot’s insufficiency. “Reprogramme it,” Nadia called forward, and then remembered him and all his sadistic simulations on the Ares, and laughed out loud. “Problem run! Problem run!” She laughed again at his shouted curses, and went back to work. At least the wind would push them along faster. Arkady yelled back information from Ann: the dust was extremely fine, average particle size about 2.5 microns; total column mass about  $10^{-3}$  grammes per  $\text{cm}^3$ , pretty evenly distributed from top to bottom of the column. That wasn’t so bad; drop it on the ground and it would be a really thin layer, which was consistent with what they had



seen on the oldest freight drops at Underhill.

When she had rewired a number of the windmills she banged down the passageway to the cockpit. "Ann says the winds will be slowest close to the ground," Arkady said.

"Good. We need to land to get those windmills outside."

So that afternoon they descended blind, and let the anchor drag until it hooked and held. The wind here was slower, but even so Nadia's descent in the sling was harrowing; down and down into rushing clouds of yellow dust, swinging back and forth...and there it was right under her boots, the ground! She hit and dragged to a halt. Once out of the sling she found herself leaning into the wind; thin as it was it still struck like blows, and her old feeling of hollowness was extreme. Visibility billowed back and forth in waves, and the dust flew past so fast it was disorienting; on Earth a wind that fast would simply pick you up and throw you, like a broomstraw in a tornado.

But here you could hold your ground, if only just. Arkady had been slowly winching the dirigible down on its anchor line, and now it bulked over her like a green roof. It was weirdly dark underneath it. She unreeled the wires out to the wingtip turboprops, taped them to the dirigible and crimped them to the contacts inside, working fast to try to reduce their exposure to dust, and to get out from under the Arrowhead; it was bouncing on the wind. With difficulty she drilled holes in the bottom of the gondola fuselage, and attached ten windmills with screws. As she was taping the wiring from these to the plastic fuselage, the whole dirigible dropped so fast she had to collapse onto her face, her whole body spread-eagled on the cold ground, the drill a hard lump under her stomach. "Shit!" she shouted. "What's wrong?" Arkady cried over the intercom. "Nothing," she said, jumping up and taping faster than ever. "Fucking thing - it's like working on a trampoline!" Then as she was finishing the wind picked up strength yet again, and she had to crawl back down to the bomb bay, her breath rasping in and out of her.

"The damn thing almost crushed me!" she shouted forward to Arkady when she had her helmet off. While he worked to unhook the anchor she staggered around the interior of the gondola, picking up things that they wouldn't need and taking them into the bomb bay: a lamp, one of the mattresses, most of the cooking utensils and dinnerware, some books, all the rock samples. In they went, and she jettisoned them happily. If some traveller ever came upon the resulting pile of stuff, she thought, they would really wonder what the hell had happened.

They had to run both props full out to get the anchor unhooked, and when they had succeeded they were off and flying like a leaf in November. They kept the props on full, to gain altitude as fast as possible; there were some small volcanoes between Olympus and Tharsis, and Arkady wanted to pass several hundred metres over them. The radar screen showed Asdraeus Mons falling steadily behind. When they were well north of it they could turn east, and try to chart a course around the northern flank of Tharsis, and then down to Underhill.

But as the long hours passed they found that the wind was rushing down the north slope of Tharsis, across their bow; so that even when running full power toward the southeast, they were still only moving northeast at best. In their attempts to fly across the wind the poor Arrowhead was bouncing like a hang glider, yanking them up and down, up and down, up and down, as if the gondola were indeed attached to the underside of a trampoline. But despite all that, they still weren't going in the direction they wanted to go.

Darkness fell again. They were carried farther northeast. On this heading, they were going to miss Underhill by several hundred kilometres. After that, nothing; no settlements at all, no refuge. They would be blown over Acidalia, up onto Vastis Borealis, up to the empty petrified sea of black dunes. And they did not have enough food and water to circumnavigate the planet again and give it another try.

Feeling dust in her mouth and eyes, Nadia went back to the kitchen and heated them a meal. Already she was exhausted, and, she realized as the smell of food filled the air, extremely hungry. Thirsty, too; and the water recycler ran on hydrazine.

Thinking about water, an image came to her mind, from the trip to the north pole: that broken permafrost gallery, with its white spill of water ice. Now how was that relevant?

She worked her way back up to the cockpit, holding onto a wall with every step. She ate a dusty meal with Arkady, trying to figure it out. Arkady watched their radar screen, saying nothing; but he was looking concerned.

Ah. "Look," she said, "if we could pick up the signals from the transponders on our road to Chasma Borealis, we could come down and land by it. Then one of the robot rovers could be sent up to get us. The storm won't matter to the robot rovers, they don't go by sight anyway. We could leave the Arrowhead tethered, and drive back home."

Arkady looked at her, finished swallowing. "Good idea," he said.

But only if they could actually pick up the road's transponder signals. Arkady flicked on the radio and called Underhill. The connection crackled in a storm of static almost as dense as the dust, but they could still make themselves understood. All through that night they conferred with the crowd back home, discussing frequencies, bandwidths, the power of the dust to mask the transponder's fairly weak signals, and so on. Because the transponders were designed only to signal rovers that were nearby and on the ground, it was going to be a problem hearing them. Underhill might be able to pinpoint their location well enough to tell them when to descend, and their own radar map would give them a general fix on the road's location as well; but neither of these methods would be very exact, and it would be almost impossible to find the road in the storm if they didn't land right on it. Ten kilometres either way and it would be over the horizon, and they would be out of luck. It would be a lot more certain if they could just latch onto one of the transponder signals, and follow it down.

In any case, Underhill dispatched a robot rover on

the road north. It would arrive in the area of the road they were expected to cross in about five days; at their current speed, now nearly thirty kilometres per hour, they would cross the road themselves in about four days.

When the arrangements were finished, they traded watches through the rest of the night. Nadia slept uneasily on her off watches, and spent much of the time lying on the bed feeling the wind bounce her. The windows were as dark as if curtains had been drawn. The roar of the wind was like a gas stove, and then occasionally like banshees; once she dreamed they were inside a great furnace full of flame demons, and woke sweating, and went forward to relieve Arkady. The whole gondola smelled of sweat and dust, and burnt hydrazine. Despite all the gaskets' micron seals, there was a visible whitish film on all the surfaces inside the gondola. She wiped her fingers across a pale blue plastic bulkhead, and stared at her fingers' mark. Incredible.

They bounded along through the gloom of the days, through the starless black of the nights. The radar showed what they thought was Fesenkov Crater, running under them; they were being shoved northeast still, and there was absolutely no chance they would be able to buck the storm and get south to Underhill. The polar road was their only hope. Nadia occupied her off watches by looking for things to throw overboard, and cutting away at parts of the gondola frame she judged inessential, until the engineers in Friedrichshafen would have shuddered. But Germans always overengineered things, and no one on Earth could ever really believe in Martian g any way. So she sawed and hammered until everything inside the gondola was latticed nearly to nothing. Every use of the bay brought in another small cloud of dust, but she figured it was worth it; they needed the loft, her windmill arrangement was not getting sufficient power to the batteries, and she had tossed the rest of them overboard long before. Even if she had had them, she would not have gone back under the dirigible to install them; the memory of the incident still gave her the shivers. Instead she kept cutting further and further; she would have tossed out pieces of the dirigible frame too, if she could have gotten into the ballonets.

While she did this Arkady padded around the gondola cheering her on, naked and dust-caked, jamming down quick meals, planning their course such as it was. It was impossible not to catch a bit of his exhilaration, to marvel with him at the strongest buffets of the wind, to feel the dust flying wild in her blood.

And so three long intense days passed, in the wild grip of the dark orange wind. And on the fourth day, a bit after noon, they turned the radio receiver up to full volume, and listened to the crackly roar of static at the transponders' frequency. Concentrating on the white noise made Nadia drowsy, for they had had very little sleep; and she was almost unconscious when Arkady said something, and she jerked up in her seat.

"Hear it?" he asked again. She listened, and shook her head. "There, it's a kind of ping."

She heard a little bip. "Is that it?"

"I think so. I'm going to get us down as fast as I can,

I'll have to empty some of the ballonets."

He tapped away at the control keyboard, and the dirigible tilted forward and they began to drop at emergency speed. The altimeter's numbers flickered down. The radar screen showed the ground below to be basically flat. The ping got louder and louder; without a directional receiver, that was going to be their only way to tell if they were still approaching it or moving away. Ping - ping - ping - In her exhaustion it was hard to tell whether it was getting louder or softer, and it seemed every beep was a different volume, depending on the attention she could bring to bear.

"It's getting softer," Arkady said suddenly. "Don't you think?"

"I can't tell."

"It is." He switched on the props, and with the whir of the motors the signal definitely seemed quieter. He turned into the wind, and the dirigible bounced wildly; he fought to steady its downward movement, but there was a delay between every shift of the flaps and the dirigible's bucking, and in reality they were in little more than a controlled crash. The ping was perhaps getting softer at a slower rate.

When the altimeter indicated they were low enough to drop the anchor they did so, and after an anxious bit of drifting it caught, and held. They dropped all the anchors they had, and pulled the Arrowhead down on the lines. Then Nadia suited up and climbed into the sling and winched down, and once on the surface she began walking around in a chocolate dawn, leaning hard into the irregular torrent of wind. She found she was more physically exhausted than she could ever remember being, it was really hard to make headway upwind, she had to tack. Over her intercom the transponder signal pinged, and the ground seemed to bounce under her feet; it was hard to keep her balance. The ping was quite distinct. "We should have been listening on our helmet intercoms all along," she said to Arkady. "You can hear better."

A gust knocked her over. She got up and shuffled slowly along, letting out a nylon line behind her, adjusting her course as she followed the volume of the pings. The ground flowed underfoot, when she could see it; visibility was actually down to a metre or less, at least in the thicker gusts. Then it would clear a touch and brown jets of dust would flash by, sheet after sheet, moving at an awesome speed. The wind buffeted her as hard as anything she had ever felt on Earth, or harder; it was painful work to keep her balance, a constant physical effort.

While inside a thick, blinding cloud, she nearly shuffled right into one of the transponders, standing there like a fat fencepost. "Hey!" she shouted.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing! I scared myself running into the road-mark."

"You found it?"

"Yeah." She felt her exhaustion run down into her hands and feet. She sat on the ground for a minute, then stood again; it was too cold to sit. Her ghost finger hurt.

She took up the nylon line, and returned blindly to the dirigible, feeling she had wandered into the ancient myth, and was following the only thread out of the labyrinth.

**D**uring their rover trip south, blind in the flying dust, word came crackling over the radio that UNOMA had just approved and funded the establishment of three follow-up colonies. Each would consist of five hundred people, all to be from countries not represented in the first hundred.

And the subcommittee on terraforming had recommended, and the General Assembly approved, a whole package of terraforming efforts, among them the distribution on the surface of genetically engineered micro-organisms, GEMs constructed from parent stock such as algae, bacteria, or lichens.

Arkady laughed for a good thirty seconds. "Those bastards, those lucky bastards! They're going to get away with it."

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**Kim Stanley Robinson** last appeared in *Interzone* with his story "A Sensitive Dependence on Initial Conditions" (issue 49). The above piece is a self-contained extract from his forthcoming novel *Red Mars*, to be published by Harper-Collins on 24th September 1992. In the short piece which follows the author discusses the genesis of his novel.

## "I Go to Mars"

**M**y fascination with Mars grew slowly over many years, fuelled by a mixture of my passion for wilderness, and the enormous bursts of new information about the planet that were transmitted by the Mariner and Viking missions. These extraordinary expeditions revealed the details of the world next door for the very first time, and we saw that it was a magnificent place.

For science fiction in particular, it was the beginning of a new era. The hundreds of Martian stories written before Mariner and Viking had been forced to portray invented surfaces for the planet, so that they were in essence stories about imaginary places, using a real name. But after 1976, it became possible to write about Mars as it really is. This seemed to me a truly wonderful opportunity. I was already active as a science-fiction writer, and in the late 1970s I wrote several stories that took place in a civilization spanning the solar system. In this civilization Mars necessarily played a large part, and when writing these stories I had the very curious sensation that I already knew Mars's human history: it was like a vague presence bulking in my unconscious mind, like an aquifer waiting to be tapped. That feeling caught my attention.

And I found that the more I studied the actual geography of Mars, the more interested I got. The sheer size of certain features of its landscape astonished me. Volcanoes three times as tall as Everest, a canyon system as big as the United States, cliffs twenty thousand feet high... In my wilderness travels I would try to imagine what these things would look like, by comparing them to the already awesome landscapes of the American West, the Himalayas, the Hebrides and so on. The resulting mental images were enthralling to me. Once I visited Meteor Crater in Arizona, and stood on the rim of that beautiful and very Martian place, and reflected that there were hundreds of such craters on Mars; and for a moment I seemed to see what the crater would look like when

domed, and holding a small town...

And then there was the possibility of terraforming. At some point in the past Mars was warmer: there are marks of flowing water to show it; and with the chemical composition of its air and soil known to us, it became possible to speculate fairly concretely about how humanity might give the planet a biosphere, and make it possible to walk around on it in the open air. A lot of people were doing this speculation, from NASA, to Nature, to the informal association of scientists called the Mars Underground. Proposals and discussions poured out, and I soaked in this information, often contacting the scientists involved to ask them questions. And the more I learned, the more I saw that terraforming Mars would be an epic story on the grandest scale.

**T**here was a problem, however. If someone were to propose humidifying the climate of the American West, for instance, and foresting all its bare deserts, I personally would be offended; I would consider that a desecration, an insult to the land's intrinsic beauty and worth. Surely there were people who would feel the same about Mars, especially after they had lived there. In fact, I wasn't so sure that I didn't feel that way myself. Was terraforming Mars really such a good idea?

But ambivalence like that is an asset to the novelist. Characters with opposing beliefs can all be drawn with genuine sympathy, and their conflicts very honestly felt. On Mars, the conflict over terraforming was certain to be intense, or so it seemed to me – and once again I had the feeling that my story was already there, pushing to get out. So, somewhere along the way it became a fact of my life that one day I would write a Mars novel. I had other books that I wanted to write first, but as I worked on them I continued to research Mars, amassing quite a library on the subject. I wrote a couple of Martian stories to test various techniques, and called one of them "Green Mars"

to lay claim to the title, which seemed so obvious to me. I feared some other science-fiction writer would use it first, and a recent letter from Arthur C. Clarke proves this was not pure paranoia: he says he would have titled his current book *Green Mars* if it had not been for the existence of my story!

I also got into the habit of looking at the mountain and desert wildernesses that I hiked in with an eye toward their Martianness. In the Mojave I would think, this looks like the photos from the Viking landers. By high lakes in the Sierra Nevada I would think, this is what the first years of terraforming will look like. While winter backpacking I would sit on my pad in the snow and think, it will be lots colder on Mars, and shiver at the thought.

Thus Mars was an integral part of my life for many years, and finally, in 1989, I began to write the story down. As soon as I started, however, I realized that the story was too long to tell in a single volume. I decided it had to be a three-decker and immediately felt better, knowing I would have the room to do what I wanted to do. So I wrote *Red Mars*, and though it was hard work, I had a wonderful time. Virginia Woolf once said, "The test of a book (to a writer) is if it makes a space in which, quite naturally, you can say what you want to say." By that test this book has been the best writing experience of my life. I am finding that all my most vital interests, in wilderness, history, science, ecology and utopia, have a place in the story and must be expressed.

As I write this I have spent two-and-a-half years on Mars, and I expect to spend about two-and-a-half years more – so I am halfway done, working through the events of *Green Mars*, with *Blue Mars* still over the horizon. I am still having a tremendous time with it, and I find as I write the second volume that Mars is as fertile as ever; wherever I tap the planet, the stories come pouring out. I trust that the aquifer will not empty until I am done.

(Kim Stanley Robinson)

## Some SF Books Set on Mars

This list consists only of novels, or linked short-story collections, and is limited to one book per author. (Of course, there have been many individual short stories set on Mars, some of which have given titles to books, e.g. Stanley G. Weinbaum's "A Martian Odyssey," Isaac Asimov's "The Martian Way" and Roger Zelazny's "A Rose for Ecclesiastes.") Where two dates are shown, the first indicates magazine publication, the second book publication.

- Across the Zodiac by Percy Greg (1880)  
 Mr Stranger's Sealed Packet by Hugh MacColl (1889)  
 A Plunge Into Space by Robert Cromie (1890)  
 A Journey to Mars by Gustavus W. Pope (1894)  
 Auf Zwei Planeten by Kurd Lasswitz (1897)  
 The Certainty of a Future Life on Mars by Louis P. Gratacap (1903)  
 Lt. Gullivar Jones - His Vacation by Edwin Lester Arnold (1905)  
 A Princess of Mars by Edgar Rice Burroughs (1912; 1917)  
 The Swordsman of Mars by Otis Adelbert Kline (1933; 1960)  
 Out of the Silent Planet by C.S. Lewis (1938)  
 The Sword of Rhiannon by Leigh Brackett (1949, 1953)  
 Red Planet by Robert A. Heinlein (1949)  
 The Martian Chronicles by Ray Bradbury (1950)  
 The Sands of Mars by Arthur C. Clarke (1951)  
 Outpost Mars by Cyril Judd (1952)  
 Return to Mars by Capt. W.E. Johns (1955)  
 Mission to Mars by Patrick Moore (1955)  
 Alien Dust by E.C. Tubb (1955)  
 Police Your Planet by Lester del Rey (1956)  
 No Man Friday by Rex Gordon (1956)  
 Martian Time-Slip by Philip K. Dick (1964)  
 Farewell, Earth's Bliss by D.G. Compton (1966)  
 Welcome to Mars by James Blish (1967)  
 The Amsirs and the Iron Thorn by Algis Budrys (1967)  
 The Earth is Near by Ludek Pesek (1970)  
 The Man Who Loved Mars by Lin Carter (1973)  
 Man Plus by Frederik Pohl (1976)  
 The Martian Inca by Ian Watson (1977)  
 Jesus on Mars by Philip José Farmer (1979)  
 Voyage to the Red Planet by Terry Bisson (1990)  
 Mars - The Red Planet by Mick Farren (1991?)  
 Mars by Ben Bova (1992)  
 Red Mars by Kim Stanley Robinson (1992)  
 The Labyrinth of Night by Allen Steele (1992)  
 Beachhead by Jack Williamson (1992)  
 Red Dust by Paul J. McAuley (forthcoming, 1993)

(Compiled by David Pringle - with thanks to Peter Nicholls and John Clute, *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, 1979, for information on the older titles.)

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<sup>1</sup> *Locus* Nov. 1989; <sup>2</sup> *Locus* Feb. 1990; <sup>3</sup> *Locus* Feb. 1991



# Swimming with the Salmon

## Ian Watson

**V**ery well then, I do admit that I deliberately set out to seduce Fiona Dougal by means of my scent and my thoughts.

Oh, I genuinely desired Fiona. That's perfectly true. From our final year together in Bradainmurch School, when Fiona bloomed so bonny, I had fantasized about her embrace. Her lips, her limbs. From Tower House, through an antique brass telescope, I spied on her swimming with the salmon. Their great gleaming silver bodies. Her naked body, which shone for me, precious as silver.

The salmon farm occupied the western third of Loch Bradain. Commercial plantations of larch, spruce, and pine cloaked most of our side of the shore, but the pointy steeple rising high from the side of Tower House was uniquely sited for invading Fiona's privacy. My great-great-grandfather had brought that fine nautical telescope back from bygone whaling days. He had spied for sperm whales; courtesy of his souvenir I spied on Fiona, and my own sperm stirred.

In vain, during adolescence. Fiona was already commencing her apprenticeship as a priestess of salmon. Having pledged herself joyfully to this useful occupation, she was closely supervised. An older woman from the farm, Meddling Maggie, chaperoned Fiona. Fiona must have been psychologically profiled as of lesbian leanings otherwise she could hardly have become a salmon apprentice, could she?

My longstanding desire aside, I was also intrigued to discover whether I could succeed in conquering Fiona. She presented a challenge – of unavailability.

As well as of vulnerability, of course...

The scent component in human semen is pyrroline. Along with androstenone and certain fatty acids, pyrroline also occurs in a man's pubic area. The aroma of pyrroline isn't unlike overripe persimmon fruit or cooked chestnuts or corn on the cob. The meal which I ate a few hours before meeting the mature Fiona on that special afternoon consisted of helpings of corn and chestnuts and persimmon as accompaniment to wild boar meat sauced with truffles and garnished with parsley. I washed the meal down with a couple of glasses of a good Cabernet, which typically vents its bouquet from the drinker's skin several hours after he imbibes.

Then I presented Fiona Dougal with chocolates rich in phenylethylamine – the new "hot chocolate" from Mexico spiced with capsaicin, a stimulating combination...

**S**ince my puberty I'd been aware that if I wished for something strongly enough then my wishes would sway people. However, it was important not to clafnour or nag. Verbal pleading provoked resistance. If I simply hinted, my heartfelt desires would insert themselves into parent or teacher or fellow pupil and flourish, magically transformed into their own preference. As a youngster I adopted a superstitious attitude to this phenomenon.

In reality, of course, my thoughts were giving rise to persuasive pheromones, chemical signals which influenced the behaviour of other people – in my case, strikingly so. Just as Fiona's pheromones could persuade fish to do as she wished. Was it a coincidence that individuals such as her and me were emerging nowadays in our enlightened era? People who could wish, and whose wishes would become messages? No, the technology for recognizing this allowed us talented ones to liberate what oodles of years of verbal civilization had repressed.

When my maths teacher, Dominie Urquhart, caught himself giving me a far higher grade than I deserved, he proceeded to scrutinize my other excellent results over the years. A COD test followed – with the ultimate consequence that I would become a diplomat in the service of the prosperous Republic of Scotland. (Prosperous, since our separation from the leech of England.) In Scotland we understood such phenomena ever since our development of Computerized Olfactory Diagnostics – in which the science of salmon farming had played no small part.

How fitting that "COD," as we called the technique, should also be the name of a fish which relies predominantly on chemical clues to trigger its behaviour. Salmon, of course, rely considerably on eyesight. Salmon possess eyes which are larger than their brains. Not that the hypothalamus of a salmon isn't massaged by hormonal chemical signals! It most certainly is. Thereby hung the whole art of modern salmiculture – and lovely Fiona Dougal's destiny.

**L**och Bradain was roughly seven miles long, by two across, and shaped like a banana. Braes rose steeply from the narrow wooded north shore where roe deer loved to graze on bilberries in season. Over there, the odd buzzard soared above bouldery burns which plunged down through bracken, feeding the loch. Our southerly shore was flat and devoted to forestry. Consequently the upthrust

of the Braes did not imply a corresponding depth to the loch. The River Baith bustled into Loch Bradain at the eastern end where the town of Bradainmurch clustered, dominated by its splendid victorian Royal Hotel. Jetties tethered motorboats equipped with power-rods for the famed wild fishing worthy of Hemingway. The Baith continued out of Bradain more lazily to the west.

However, no salmon ever entered or left the loch by either branch of the Baith. Nor would they particularly yearn to leave, even if there weren't electrical containment fields in the water.

*Salmo Magnus* – the giant salmon, upwards of eight feet long at maturity – had been genetically engineered to lack any migratory instinct whatever to seek the sea. This new species could be permanently farmed in one location.

Now, your ordinary salmon is by turns a very greedy eater and an anorexic. While at sea, it stuffs itself. Once back in its home river to spawn, your regular salmon starves. If it didn't starve itself, it might eat a river empty – of its own kin too. Anglers who caught your ordinary salmon in a river or loch would only ever find a minimal coating of slime in its belly when gutting it, narry a scrap of food.

So how did anglers ever manage to catch salmon? Not due to a salmon's greed for bait, oh no. But rather by teasing the fish's curiosity with a well-played lure.

And who teased a salmon best? Who caught the largest cock salmon? Who massaged these zany fishes' brains and racked up the records?

Notoriously it was women anglers.

Gillies had long since known that a man only needed to dip his finger in the spume at the bottom of a salmon run to scare salmon away for half an hour – whereas tyro female anglers could land 50-pounders within minutes, as though charming the fish out of the water.

As in truth these ladies did, with their hormonal pheromones.

The odour of menstruation is prawny... while vanilla is a Spanish word derived from the Latin *vagina* ... Think on't; think on't.

So as to attain maximum weight as swiftly as possible *Salmo Magnus* must feed enthusiastically and constantly. Yet the sex organs shouldn't mature too early. Peer aggression must be suppressed.

The folk wisdom of the gillie, and genetic engineering, and odour diagnostics converged. The very best masseuse of the behaviour of these big fish was... woman. Woman herself, swimming with the big fish daily, releasing her scents into the water, massaging their nervous systems. Woman, without – it goes without saying – any reek of man about her. Virgin woman. Or lesbian woman. Whichever.

Hence the banning of men from the salmon co-operatives. Hence the priestly, sapphic role which Fiona Dougal was to undertake.

Pheromones come in two classes. There are releaser pheromones which provoke a rapid, kneejerk reaction. Whereas primer pheromones alter the physiology of a creature through its endocrine system, thus conditioning its future, longer-term behaviour. The women who swam with the salmon primed those fish and kept them well-primed to gobble and gobble their food pellets docilely till they were ripe for harvest –

and a percentage of them for release into the wild zone of the loch where men could angle for them, as I was to angle for Fiona on my return from Mexico.

Salmon can fairly be described as crazy fish. Bizarre, eccentric fish. Capricious, curious creatures of whim. Those who only know salmon as a red steak on a plate know nothing. And the women of the fish farms knew secrets unbeknownst to man. Fulfilling secrets, I'm sure. For salmon had always possessed a deep rapport with women. As did many fish species, to a lesser degree. It was a woman who wrote the first treatise on angling back in 1425 or so. Dame Juliana. Specialized cells on the skins of salmon respond to complex stimuli; and it must be true that women responded in turn to the touch and caress and pressure of *Salmo Magnus*.

Thus the women of the fish farms were effectively witches belonging to a piscine nature cult quite out of bounds to man – a cult where, yes, one ate the God! Well, this was modern Scotland, land of enlightenment. One did not bridle at such scientific witchery or at a necessary lesbianism or celibacy.

Superficially these women were merely very competent pisciculturists – a respected élite of specialists whose natural glandular secretions happened to play a major role in their work. I suspected more. This witchcraft intrigued me utterly.

**W**hat of my relations with Fiona, before her destiny seized her? What of that cusp of time during which she bloomed, just prior to her enrolment in the cult?

Why did I not exert myself then, to wish a kiss? To wish more? To project my desires upon Fiona? To lead her on a ramble through woods where the wee siskins feasted on pine and spruce seeds; through rhododendrons spreading their tents of glossy leaves?

The reason was my twisted foot which surgery had failed to correct fully. I would have been ashamed to shed my special shoe, thus any other of my garments. I didn't swim. I was excused from sports. I wouldn't have wished to hobble into the woods or rhododendrons, emphasizing my flaw – and where else was there for a lad to go?

Only later on did I realize that such a deformity could lead to Byronic achievements with the ladies, over whom a clubbed foot might actually exert a fascination and a magnetism comparable to those persuasive pheromones I deployed as though by way of compensation.

Fiona certainly consorted with no other lads, and she spurned any of their fumbling overtures. Consequently I wasn't tormented by jealousy, which might have spurred me to wish. Besides, I was only fifteen then, and uncertain exactly what I would be wishing for in practical detail. For a wish to come true I needed to visualize the outcome more accurately.

Soon she was sixteen; and so was I. And she joined the cult, while I was on my route out of Bradainmurch, and only remained alert to Fiona's attractions, in miniature, by telescope. (Did she ever glance up from the salmon-teeming water and spy the glint of the glass high up on Tower House?)

Were I a salmon I might have seen Fiona even more acutely, for during the daytime a salmon favours the

colour-perceptive cones in its eye, while at dusk these retract in favour of the optic rods which see black and white, thus boldly silhouetting desirable shapes. Remarkable creatures! I was jealous of those giant fish gliding between Fiona's legs, rubbing their slime-coated scales sinuously, powerfully against her flesh. I was jealous of the secrets which I was sure she was learning, and which separated her from me.

Yet in a sense, in that piscine harem of the farm, she was being safeguarded for my future self, was she not? The secret of a great love is often separation, confinement of one party, exile of the other. Stendhal, who wrote much about love, understood this. Perhaps, in this regard, I am the archetypal lover – whose other conquests were all subsidiary to my feelings for forbidden Fiona.

**A**wish can accumulate over many years until it discharges itself overwhelmingly and compellingly...

After attending Glasgow University, where I concentrated on foreign languages and economics, I travelled widely in the diplomatic service. There are so many mini-nations in the world, fractions of one-time larger countries enmeshed in new alliances. One is almost a medieval traveller, once again. And I often found lovers, almost as if the fractured world was trying through me to reknit itself erotically into a macro-organism. I persuaded women, as effectively as I persuaded foreign politicians and industrialists. My heraldry would have been a clubbed foot set within a heart.

Always, reinforced by all these encounters, a fundamental dominating wish was building up like thunderous electric potential in the sky seeking its lightning conductor.

I believe now that I wasn't obsessed in a pathological fashion (the beast beneath the diplomatic facade, as it were) but rather that a curious form of pheromonal feedback operated, whereby I imprinted myself with my own persuasions – with self-persuasions. In my heart, always the memory trace of Fiona Dougal, naked, water-cloaked, at once far away and near, swimming with the phallic fish.

I denied myself the chance of returning prematurely to Tower House, enjoying the high tension which this self-exile generated in me. My own parents had divorced acrimoniously when I was eight, and the Republic of Scotland had deemed it best for me to live with my uncle and aunt in Tower House just outside Bradainmurch on the lochside. A rural upbringing. I never felt especially close to Duncan and Tara Hamilton, whose surname I adopted. After I left for Glasgow, Tanty-Tara died suddenly – of a stroke – and thereafter Unk-Dunk became a grouching recluse, who seemed to blame me for wishing her dead. Now that he knew of my talent he reinterpreted my boyhood, and the way that Tanty-Tara had constantly put herself out for me, harshly. To his now-disordered mind, she had worn herself out on behalf of a parasite. Sufficient for me to viz Unk-Dunk once in a while on the phonescreen. He never suggested I pay a visit.

I reserved old-style written letters for Fiona, and these were part of my long-term strategy, careful moves in my master game of love. I commenced on my very first junior posting, to Québec.



Illustrations by Tony Roberts

A voice from the past – or rather, no diskletter voice at all, but elegantly calligraphed words. A bolt from the blue for Fiona Dougal.

I felt the need, I explained to her, to write to somebody back home – since my aunt had died, and my uncle was potty – so as to preserve my sense of connection with Bradainmurch and the past; and I trusted that Fiona would not mind being the recipient of my random musings?

I made those letters as fascinating as I could, full of local Québécois colour. Fiona, who must have been puzzled, did reply to the third with a jaunty holocard depicting the Braes. Her writing was scrawly and she spelled a couple of words eccentrically.

Thus I wrote, for another decade, while the wish accumulated within me. I wrote from Catalunya, from Byelorussia, from Amazonia, from Mexico. Fiona's life, of course, was the loch; yet the exotic presently hooked her. Since I was forever elsewhere (and took my vacations elsewhere), I seemed a safe person to confide in (to a certain degree) about her life on the farm. Oh, no secrets, to be sure! She was reserved about those. Yet I gathered that she now enjoyed the companionship of one Jane McDonald, that they were thinking about maybe adopting a daughter later on, that Meddling Maggie had retired to the Hebrides, that Fiona and Jane would go into town of a Friday night to drink Glenbaith whiskies (made with water taken from further upstream, so as not to confuse odours)... Fiona sometimes wrote about fish diseases, which seemed to fascinate her. Infective Haematopoietic Necrosis caused frenzied swimming and bulging of the eyeballs. Myxosomiasis, due to parasites becoming encysted in the brain, was also known as Whirling Disease; fish would chase their own tails relentlessly.

I never sent a holo-pic of myself, nor she of herself. It wasn't that sort of correspondence (though at the same time, of course, it was becoming so, on the non-verbal level). Nor did I ever scent my writing paper with pyrroline.

Then she was thirty; and I was thirty. I'd begun to hint about a remarkable Mayan sculpture of fish and woman which I had come across in the Yucatan jungle. Erotic, disturbing, numinous. At this point, fortuitously Unk-Dunk died, likewise of a stroke and of lying alone in Tower House undiscovered for several days.

**M**y diplomatic duties prevented me from returning in time for his funeral early in August. But a month later I flew in to Bradainmurch by helicopter, squandering a substantial sum on this private flight just so that we could pass slowly over the salmon farm.

The loch seemed to writhe with silver worms under the skin of water. There, in their own zones, were a horde of smaller salmon. In adjacent zones, larger fish. Then, largest of all: seven, eight-footers. Colour-coded marker buoys indicated boundaries and corridors. From the bed of the loch submerged cables deployed electric fields – of four volts per metre, to be precise, in pulses lasting 0.8 milliseconds 15 times per second. These fields prevented any salmon from straying into senior or junior territory. Which was due to electrotoxis. Any fish entering the electric field would

lose control of its swimming muscles. Nerve cells under the salmon's skin would kick the fish into a reflex, compelling it to return towards the positive electrode.

Compelling it. Salmo couldn't do otherwise, whatever he wished. His body would simply disobey his brain, and obey the electric field instead.

Would Fiona's body disobey her brain? Or would it be her brain which disobeyed the usual preferences of her body and the codes of her fish cult?

We were flying sluggishly at a few hundred feet. Down below, a nude woman scrambled on to one of the rafts, shaking herself as if in protest at our intrusion. Was that herself? No, the woman down below was raven-haired. Since this was September, she might already be wearing a heating wet, though such a mesh was transparent – since salmon are visual identifiers – and flimsy, since bodily exposure was of the essence.

Why didn't she stay submerged instead of exposing herself? Ah, the food dispenser on the raft began to throw out its hailstorm of synthetic protein pellets. The water boiled as Salmo gobbled.

A floating walkway led from that raft to a jetty where a stubby barge wallowed, part-flooded inside, some mobile aquatic surgery equipped with stout winch and plastic sling. The hugest of the farm buildings overlapped the water on stone pillars. A lane of day-glo red buoys led under the overhang. Ah, somewhere within – somewhere more confined – would be a killing zone, for electrocuting the harvest of the loch.

Could it be that a fish mistress would swim in under there, luring the chosen fish along with her like some pheromonal Pied Piper? Momentarily I imagined malice and murder, since a full-grown Salmo's body was bigger than a woman's. If a fish mistress was still in the water she could be shocked dead by a seeming malfunction. I quickly dismissed this fantasy, for the priestesses must live together in amity, must they not?

That major building must also house the gutting lines, packing lines, freezers, smoking kilns... And what else? Oh yes, an ascorbic acid tank to reduce rancidity in storage. A big one of those.

Other buildings were visibly residential. For the first time it occurred to me to wonder whether the women actually did eat salmon – even ceremonially, at special feasts? Or was eating the flesh of Salmo Magnus perhaps taboo...?

Mysteries, mysteries... And that covered floating structure... close by a brood zone? Was that a place where the priestesses milked mature bucks of their milk?

I ceased craning my neck, for we were well beyond the farm by now. Sooty-faced sheep grazed along the shoreline.

"Had enough of an eyeful?" the pilot asked dourly.

"A salmon would have seen more," said I, thinking of those giant eyes.

"Maybe next time you ought to come home by submarine," was his response.

**U**nk-Dunk had never fitted any part of Tower House out with automatics, thus I hadn't been able to control its status remotely. However, I'd asked uncle's solicitor in Bradainmurch to send



in his clerk to switch on the boiler and heating and fridge in anticipation of my arrival.

I shared a dram with whiskey Mr Henderson in his office and accepted muted condolences – bearing in mind that I hadn't been back in over a decade and had, unlike dutiful Mr Henderson, missed the funeral. Despite Unk-Dunk's mutterings, he had never reneged on an early will drawn up in my favour. Well, I wouldn't have wished him to, even though no viz-phone call conveyed aromas.

I drove the rental electro Volvo along the lakeside road quickly, the sooner to transfer my boar meat and truffles and persimmon from a travelling coolpack into the fridge. Before heading to the heliport in Glasgow I'd stocked up at a delicatessen.

The old house was somewhat of a mess inside, as one might expect of a crusty widower's abode. More significantly, it smelled of some damned lavatorial disinfectant, and at first I experienced quite a surge of annoyance at the Bradainmurch authorities and Henderson. Unk-Dunk hadn't exactly rotted here, so why should they presume to disinfect Tower House! I threw all doors and windows wide open, as well as turning the heating up full to compensate for the incoming breezes.

As I ranged through the familiar rooms on all three floors I discovered the sources of the wretched smell. Just as a person with spiritual inclinations might burn incense, so my uncle had secreted saucers of disinfectant all over the house to de-scent the air and banish any rival fragrances. In the cellar itself lurked half a dozen large cases of unopened bottles of germicide. Unhinged by Tanty-Tara's death, had Unk-Dunk supposed that by this stratagem, which he presumably rationalized as maintaining a healthy regime in Tower House, he was purging all trace of my influence?

I swiftly got rid of all such saucers, which bid fair to thwart me from beyond the grave. Naturally I'd brought aphrodisiacal essential oils with me. Sweet spicy sandalwood which relieves anxiety in a sedative way. Euphoric jasmine, warming and relaxing. And juniper, the pleasant terebinthate odour of which counteracts trembling and coldness. I went off into the woods to gather a sackful of pine needles, cones, and bark, and soon had impromptu potpourri in every room. Then I tackled a build-up of dust and cobwebs which surely predated my uncle's demise, and a kitchenful of dirty utensils.

Soon night fell, so I locked the doors, though I still left windows open. After fixing myself a neutral, purgative meal of rice and bland beans, I mounted at last to the hexagonal lookout room and sat at the faithful old telescope to scan the moon-dappled reaches of the loch. I attached a micro-electronic photomultiplier which I'd bought in Mexico City. Alas, since my adolescence trees had grown taller. My perspective on the waters of the salmon farm was curtailed. No matter! I need be a voyeur no more.

**“M**y correspondent,” repeated Fiona – exactly as she had said on the vizphone that morning when I called the salmon farm to invite her to tea; for which she had arrived by bicycle.

She clasped both my hands briefly before perching on the sofa, smoothing down a tartan skirt, which was



Hunting Stewart, I believe. The black, red, and yellow grid lines on the blue-green background of the plaid suggested to me those cables and electric fields in the waters of the loch. Fiona also wore a white blouse, over which her russet hair spilled, and matching tartan socks and strong leather sandals. Oh she was muscular from all the swimming, as well as from labour inside the fish factory. An athlete, or goddess, whose delicate freckles had merged together so that she was golden. Full lips, noble nose, wide opaline eyes.

She gazed at me full of curiosity, as I lightly limped towards Tanti-Tara's tea service, seeing the gauche boy of yesteryear transformed into a graceful, languid but passionate man, hazel-haired, with knowing eyes which had seen many countries.

She couldn't help glancing at my clumpy shoe. "So they never... Oh I'm sorry," she murmured, confused. Already, physical curiosity. "But why did you write to me?"

"I think," I replied, "that I needed a secret confidante, one who was aware of secrets herself. Of the mysteries of the world."

"Mysteries, as in the jungles of Yucatan... Jamie?" Ah, my intimate name...

"It's galling... Fiona," I replied, "but my camera got a dunking and was smashed against a boulder in a stream we were fording. You see, I was swept off my feet. The film disc was ruined. The statue was in obsidian – black glassy volcanic rock, too heavy to transport. We stumbled upon it near the coast, half coated in creepers. A fish and a woman were coiled together as though they were lovers. My guides had seen nothing like that before, and archeologists I asked... well, they were disparaging. This was outside of their experience."

I handed her a cup of tea and a plate of shortbreads interspersed with many chocolates.

"I brought these chocs all the way from Mexico," I explained. She ate a couple. And then a few more.

Her odour, close to, hinted at a fishy oiliness. The net curtains of the drawing room filtered dying September sunlight across the two thick sheepskin rugs I'd laid over the frayed old checkered carpet. Embers glowed ruddily in the stone hearth; fresh flame licked around a new log. The room was hot.

"What makes you think there are secrets?" she asked, nodding in the direction of the loch.

"There must be, mustn't there?"

"Because you have secrets?"

I shrugged. "Why are you interested in this fish and woman statue, then?"

"Why?" she echoed. (Yes, let her echo me.) "Why? Because you are, Jamie!"

"And why am I interested in it, Fiona?"

I wished. I craved. I yearned, as never before with any woman.

Amidst scents of jasmine and juniper and sandalwood potpourri, whiff of woodsmoke, subtle bouquet of Cabernet, fragrance of boar and truffle, the subterranean magma of desire was welling upward, venting all its persuasive pheromones...

Fiona considered me. "I feel I know you so well from all your letters, Jamie..."

Let us really know each other then, Fiona. Let us. Let us.

Of course, I abridge somewhat.

The moon was rising when we at last uncoiled, there upon those sheepskin rugs in the glow of the fire. I felt strangely bestialized – yet exaltingly so – as though I'd been transformed into another species of being, into a puissant giant godlike fish, which at last – at long last – Fiona could couple with realistically, and upon whom she had discharged at last all her own decade and more of accumulated appetite. Surely this was the secret of the salmon farm – this alien cathexis, this focusing of vital energy upon a foreign species without hope hitherto of full consummation. Fiona's own female lover, Jane, was human, after all. Jane might imitate *Salmo Magnus* but could not be *Salmo*.

The story I had concocted, of that Mayan idol, had not been so far askew after all. Deep in all human dreams, as exposed by myth, was the yearning to unite with whichever totem creature a culture chose as its inhuman ideal, to represent Otherness. Eagle. Jaguar. Serpent. Spirit-guides; yet also emblems of the body's desire by means of Otherness to become... magnificent, transcendent.

And thus Fiona was fulfilled. And I too. And I.

She did not reproach me, since what we had enacted was... sublime. The moon outside the window seemed to say that if we human beings ever travelled far beyond to another world of sapient beings somewhere in the universe, then our meeting with such beings should ideally be thus.

She did not reproach. Yet she was riven by an anguish.

"I shall swim home," she told me. "I shall swim to clean myself."

"Aren't you hungry, Fiona?" I asked her.

"Hungry? How could I be hungry when I have gorged myself?"

"Do you have a heating web with you?"

She shook her russet hair. No.

"It's September. It's night."

"The chill will kill scents." She laughed brusquely. Contradictorily, she added, "Strong swimming warms a person. I shall swim so strongly tonight, burning off what has happened."

It would have been banal to offer to drive her back in the Volvo, supposing that she simply didn't wish to ride her bike.

"Don't worry that I'll drown," she assured me.

Nude, she sprinted across the unkempt lawn, down the strand of sand. She waded. She dived. Her tartan skirt had remained like a map discarded.

Pulling a sheepskin rug around me like some ancient savage, I gimped upstairs again to my telescope. By amplified light I watched Fiona cleave the waters of Bradain.

Presently silver humps broke the surface near where she swam. Wild *Salmo Magnus* accompanied her, those prey for the hooks of Hemingways. Though no doubt scenting traces of human semen, they didn't flee. Around her, the water seemed to foam with milk. Could that merely be liquid moonlight?

So was it actually milt that I saw? The roe of the male fish, discharged due to the tang of my own seed within Fiona, and upon her?

And then she swam through the shock-fields; her

muscles wouldn't disobey in the way that a fish's would.

And in her womb, or in a fallopian tube, the electric shock fused milt and sperm and ovum...

What Jane McDonald has deposited to the Procurator Fiscal is that Fiona Dougal became pregnant that night. When the other fish mistresses sensed this (quite soon), they sequestered Fiona as if she were some delinquent nun in a medieval convent; though housed in more comfort...

I'm summarizing what you told me, Mr Ambassador... Jock. What they sent in the pouch from Scotland, in the diplomatic sporan. So that we get all the facts and nuances correct. Thus we might sort out the truth.

After that special afternoon, I only stayed on in Bradainmurch for five more days, sufficient to put Tower House on the market. I didn't see Fiona again, nor did I viz her at the farm. Well, the wish had gone. The wish had been fulfilled. Transcendently so. How banal – how impractical – to contemplate... an affair, which a woman in Fiona's line of occupation couldn't conceivably countenance, especially given her emotional bias. If she had chosen to viz me, I'd have been astonished. Before leaving Bradainmurch, I had a local girl ride Fiona's bike back to the farm gate and park the bike there, with an addressed parcel upon the saddle containing Fiona's abandoned clothing. I included no paltry note. Nor did I write again, from abroad. Nor did she write to me, from her confinement.

You say that as Fiona's pregnancy advanced, the mistresses leased a small domestic ultrasound scanner? And found, to their consternation that the lower half of the foetus curled up within her displayed the contours of... a fish...

That what was growing in her womb was a merbaby?

A teratogenic monster? Or... a consummation for their cult?

When Fiona commenced labour, the mistresses took her out into the loch? There, in the water, she gave birth to this hybrid – of me, and her, and Salmo?

And the baby – a girl – swam a little?

Yet, scenting the blood of birth, a great cock salmon darted up and ate the little mermaid voraciously.

It was then that Jane McDonald fled from the farm in horror, and from Fiona, to the Procurator Fiscal, demanding prosecutions of the priestesses, and of me as well for some reason as accessory to the deed...

But Fiona herself didn't flee. And she has denied this version of events. She is soon going to become the chief fish mistress of Loch Bradain, so you tell me.

I must remind you, Jock, that Jane is a renegade, a crazed woman. And the evidence is missing... eaten, so Jane claims.

Why does the Procurator believe that a merchild could be born at all? He does, doesn't he? He must be daft in the head. Jock, I don't much wish to go back there to testify. I really don't.

I suppose that a fish-tailed child should best be born in water... In that case why didn't the mistresses protect the birthing zone with an electric field? Did some malicious body switch the current off? Did Jane herself, as a jealous revenge for being betrayed by Fiona? Or are we hinting at a deliberate sacrifice of

that fishy firstborn? Is that it, Jock? Hence Fiona becoming high priestess afterwards! Then Jane McDonald became terrified at what was happening?

Ah. I see that I've fallen into a trap. A fish-tailed child. Yes, those were my words: a fish-tailed child. The absurd power of the notion has already captured me. I, who have been such a dab hand at persuading people, women especially, am now persuaded in turn. When my seduction of Fiona was so climactic – culmination of so many years of canny ardour – how could I imagine that the event would have had no consequence? That the whole episode would simply come to a full stop after she swam away from Tower House? In this sense I suppose I am an accomplice – innocent accessory to something which our Procurator frets about, something he fears may emerge from the mutant fish farms where the pheromonal women swim. Some marvel, some abomination. Some half-human fish-goddess. A chimera. I can spy his drift now, Jock.

Pledged to eschew the embraces of men, the priestesses couldn't have expected anything like this to happen. Fiona swam home so as to "cleanse" herself, she told me. Yet now those women have experienced a dreadful miracle. What if another of them is impregnated by a man and immediately swims among the milt-spurring giant cock salmon? Presuming that Jane McDonald did cut the current and kill the newborn mermaid, what if chief fish mistress Fiona herself chooses to repeat her act of intercourse?

Oh, I don't wish to fly home, Jock. Can't you perceive the peril I might be in? How vulnerable I could become, now that this conception is in my head, persuading me?

Sleep on it.

Why certainly, sleep on it. You're an understanding gentleman, Jock. Probably I could use a leave of absence. Of course I appreciate why the Procurator wants to quiz me about this peculiar affair. Exports of salmon are important to the Scottish economy.

I think of my semen mixed with milt. Outside Ambassador Dalgleish's office, the Mexican sun is blinding bright, like a copper gong on fire. Nowhere in Mexico does it shine on any obsidian idol of any fish and woman mating. Yet in a Scottish loch, far away in the land of enlightenment, that same sun rose earlier today upon a loch, and upon silver bodies which the human race has created by godlike intervention in their genes, aping a divine intimacy.

How, now, shall I renew my intimacy with Fiona Dougal?

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**Ian Watson**, born 1943, is the author of many sf novels rich in ideas, including *The Embedding* (1973), *The Jonah Kit* (1975), *The Martian Inca* (1977), *Miracle Visitors* (1978), *God's World* (1979), *The Gardens of Delight* (1980), *Death-hunter* (1981), *Chekhov's Journey* (1983), *The Book of the River* (1984), *Queenmagic*, *Kingmagic* (1986), *The Fire Worm* (1988) and *The Flies of Memory* (1990). His short stories, several of which first appeared in *Interzone*, have been collected in such volumes as *The Very Slow Time Machine* (1979), *Sunstroke* (1982), *Slow Birds* (1985), *Evil Water* (1987), *Salvage Rites* (1989) and *Stalin's Teardrops* (1991). He lives in Northamptonshire.

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# Plenty of Space

## Stan Nicholls talks to Colin Greenland

**"I** think science fiction is in good shape at the moment," Colin Greenland pauses before adding, "Except for the recession, and publishing being run by accountants."

They sound like two pretty big "buts." "Yeah, they're enormous and they qualify everything," he agrees, "but I like the fact that there's no single form, no one way we're supposed to be writing. I like the fact that it's impossible for anybody to read everything being published under science fiction. That's escape velocity as far as I'm concerned. We can now begin to work out how many different things we can do within the rubric of science fiction."

"What I don't like is that it's possible to build a career in the field on no talent whatsoever, simply on being able to write fast and doing what's currently hip. On the other hand, it's only fair to say that kind of writing is crucial to us; the relentless outpourings of trash fiction actually gets you some wonderfully rich imagery to play with when you come along later and spend a bit more time on it. But it does mean there's a lot of sf which is imitative and stays very cautiously within given boundaries. That's a shame. We should be startling people."

The young Greenland did not tread the traditional path of many would-be science-fiction writers by spending his time reading the likes of Asimov and Clarke. "I read very patchily around them until the later days of New Worlds, when it went into paperback, in 1972 or whenever it was. I picked that up and was reading Aldiss, Ballard, Moorcock and maybe a little Disch, and finding that area where science fiction was sort of getting above itself. That really appealed to me."

He had acquired a taste for fantastic literature before this, but, "You have to broaden your idea of fantasy. What I liked was anything that told me there was another world which was somehow hidden, or else told me this world was other than it appears to be. I liked fantasy and science fiction but I wasn't a great fan; I didn't devour it exclusively the way a lot of sf readers do. I was also reading books about magic, codes, UFOs, hollow Earth theories — anything that stimulated my imagination and said the world was not what you see out of your window. I wanted

constant reaffirmation that the world is stranger than we think."

Part of his gravitation towards writing sf, he says, stemmed from it being a very social form to work in. "You've got the whole fan subculture; the conventions, fanzines and so on. You're in touch with your readers. Or even if they're not your readers they are people who read this stuff. So you're not isolated. That feels sustaining and you can get feedback from it."

**A**n example of this kind of feedback came after the publication of his second novel, *The Hour of the Thin Ox*, where he had a character die abruptly at a crucial point in the story. "The number of people who objected to me killing him at that juncture told me something about what I was doing. I think it's perfectly OK to kill a central character on stage at an unexpected point, but you've got to have something else to sustain the narrative thread that has suddenly been lopped off. I hadn't prepared my B character to come in and carry on the plot, and that's what the readers were missing."

"So I'm very grateful to fans for their dedication and devotion. But to me devotion has never been the point. You shouldn't pledge yourself to any one thing rather than any other, because you don't know what the future is going to bring."

"Dave McKean tells me there are comic artists coming up now who are very professional and slick, but they are copying people who were influenced by the innovators of the 60s and 70s; or now him, for goodness sake. People who have seen and drawn nothing but comics, in other words. It's the same in science fiction, where many people read not only nothing but sf, but nothing other than the latest sf. Originality's not a big thing with me — I think it's overrated and far more ambiguous than most people admit — but they don't even know if they're getting something new or not. With a little bit of perspective on the thing we could do it right. Or do it better."

Greenland places himself firmly at the "soft" end of the broad panoply of modern sf. He doesn't even try writing the hard stuff. The very idea makes him laugh. "No, I couldn't. That's not the kind of mind I've got. I don't object

to people writing hard sf; in fact I like people writing it, and I enjoy some of it. But a lot of it can have that kind of tunnel vision which means it only deals with things in technical terms. Hard sf writers are so used to dealing with subjects which can be explained they tend to think everything is like that. That's why they can give us this rather unsatisfying view of the world in which so much has been left out. It's a reductive kind of writing. It doesn't have to be.

"I'm delighted there are people like Greg Bear who can explain the universe, and do it in an exciting, involving and humane fictional form. But I'm not one of them. I'm one of the inhabitants, not a commentator. If people say to me, 'Where is the science in your books?' I say it's all around, we live in it. We try to make it go."

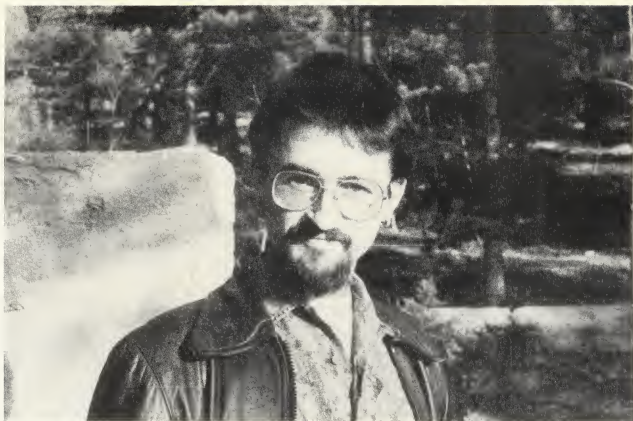
"I read Paul McAuley's latest novel with great pleasure, but it's got equations in it. Now, when I come to a passage of writing so dense it actually turns into equations I'm going to skim over it, and I know I'm not going to pick up the information. Fortunately Paul is doing it in a form I can enjoy as fiction. But I know when I get to the equation I don't understand he would rather I go off to the reference library and find out what he's trying to tell me. He's saying part of the point of his book is to teach me the equations I don't know."

I offer the opinion that I prefer to take the author's word for it. "Yes, exactly. And I want my readers to take my word for it. If I tell them there are canals on Mars there are canals on Mars. Another book will tell them something else."

**I**n Greenland's fiction the science is secondary to the characters and their response to the technology surrounding them. "If I haven't got the human experience in a book I lose it. I believe we're all joined together because we're organically related and totally dependent on each other. That kind of web is very important to me."

"What you have to realize is that when you send your characters to the moon they've taken everything with them. The people who live on Mars, fictionally, are still us. We carry all the baggage, all the complicated, weird things we do with one another, wherever we





Colin Greenland

go. You owe it to your readers to put that in. You owe it to yourself. To me there would be no fun in writing about spaceships flying around and shooting at each other if they were just little tin toys. They are only interesting if there are real people in them having to cope with the issues real people have to cope with.

"So I have to start by believing in my character. I've got to know her to the point where I can feel what she's feeling. If I miss that, everything else slides away and I lose the dynamic, the magnetism, whatever it is, which pulls you through."

To say "her" and "she" comes naturally to him. Many of his central characters, like Tabitha, hero of the Arthur C. Clarke and BSFA awards-winning novel *Take Back Plenty*, are women. In fact the dedication to that book reads, "To the women behind the wheel." Self-evidently, he likes and respects women. "Yes, I'm much more happy in the company of a given woman than a given man. Groups of men I certainly find very difficult, because the content of what you're saying is irrelevant to how much status you're supposed to be acquiring, or maintaining. I'm bad at that and can't be bothered with it."

"But what I was thinking of more in that dedication is that I often seem to be relying on women for some kind of motive power in my life. I rely a lot on Jane [Johnson], my editor, to steer me back on course when the book's wobbling. I rely totally on Maggie [Noach],

my agent, for the business side. I wanted to say *Plenty* was a book about a woman driver, and thought I'd put, "To women drivers." But I realized that placed it in an area where people are for or against, and it starts to provoke jokes — women drivers and mothers-in-law, that kind of thing. So I couldn't say that.

"I'm not a biological determinist. I don't think there are virtues which go with any gender. It's a matter of what our culture makes possible for us. Women are not born into a position of power because we're living in a society tilted against them in so many ways. So they have to come up with their own strengths and strategies, and get things sorted very much quicker."

"I've had two kinds of response to Tabitha. One is, 'I don't believe she would act like that. She lets herself be put upon too much.' The other is, 'She's like me. I'd be just the same.' The first kind of people are men and the second are women."

*Take Back Plenty* was originally written as a short story. "I took it to Milford and had it dumped on. I tried another story with the same character, because I realized there was more mileage, took that again to Milford and had it dumped on even more." On the second occasion Bruce Sterling was there. "He was wonderful, he was great. He was like a lightning conductor absorbing all this energy, excitement, enthusiasm and antagonism, and earthing it. And he hated the story. Everybody hated it, but they all liked

something about it. The accumulated response was that I was trying to do too many things in one short story. Gradually, I woke up to the obvious, which was that it had to be a novel, and, by my standards, a long novel. You can't write a space book without giving yourself plenty of space."

"But I faced the prospect with a certain amount of dread because I find writing very hard. I'm sort of anal retentive — 'Can I put this word down? No, I'll change it. All right, yes! No, no!' Then I'll spend half an hour on a comma and replace it with a semicolon. The next day I put the comma back again. I'm awful. I can't just lay down words and polish them."

As Greenland's plots do not depend on detailed scientific exposition research tends to be way down the list unless unavoidable. "If inspiration fails there is creativity. If creativity fails there is work. If work fails there is theft. If theft fails there is research." I only get to grubbing out facts when I can't come up with anything from my imagination. And my imagination is stored with all the things I've read and seen, people I've met and talked to, things that have happened to me, memories, dreams...everything. If I can't find anything in that which works I have to go and find out.

"In the book I'm writing at the moment, *Harm's Way*, there's a scene in which an old woman in roughly 1840 opens a matchbox. I suddenly thought, 'Oh my God, did they have

matchboxes in 1840?" There was nothing I could do about that except research it. Either that or back up and do something else." (Yes, they had matchboxes in 1840.)

"At the same time I'm throwing in a lot of things I know are not true," he adds. "Harm's Way is set on Mars, and I refer to canals. I know there aren't canals on Mars but I'm much more interested in the Mars we've built as a race of readers and writers; the Mars that Wells, Bradbury and Leigh Brackett wrote about. The Mars of our imagination is considerably more fertile than the reality. But I've got to talk about it confidently, as if it were a real place, although I know I'm only putting down words."



Cover of the U.S. paperback edition

Does he have any specific ambitions he hopes to achieve as a writer? "I've always said I don't particularly want to be famous or rich, but I'd like to be solvent. I'm just about beginning to see a possibility of solvency. But it's not only the security of knowing there are people who want to buy the books; I need to reach into their minds and touch something in them. I want to make people smile, or just pass an hour pleasantly for them, and ideally make them think a little bit along the way. That's vital to me."

"Consequently I feel much more secure with the kind of fiction which exists in the market place, where you can look at a book and say it has a potential of so many readers if it has a certain print-run, and such and such a price on it. That feels much better to me than following my lonely muse and writing something only twenty people in the world want to read. The mass-market paperback is my ideal."

"Every so often in science fiction somebody comes along with a manifesto. I hate that. I mean the sort of person who says everything that happened in the 70s was bad, and we must

get back to an authentic brand of science fiction; that it must be streetwise and overtly about political concerns. I've no objections to any of that except the word 'must.' Sf should be as rich and various as you can make it, for God's sake. We haven't even scratched the surface of the way it could be."

I remind him of Heinlein's reply to an interviewer who asked him to define science fiction – "It's what I say it is." "Right. It's got to be. The only thing you know when you open a science-fiction book is that it's not going to take place in the world in which you're reading it. Something has changed. It might be one little thing or it might be everything. The only thing you know is that it's going to be different. So a piece of sf has got to do two jobs at once. It's not only got to tell the story, it's got to build the world in which the story happens."

On one level this is true of all fiction, surely? "I don't think it is. There is an actual, integral, necessary difference between writing. 'She went down the road and into Sainsbury's' and, 'She went down the road and into a spaceship.' I subscribe to the theory that we can only communicate because the words we use refer to other things. If I say 'Sainsbury's' you have an image in your mind you can relate to. If I say 'trifid', and your experience does not include sf, you don't have a referent for that word."

Unless you are writing for fans, a self-referential audience? "Yes. All science fiction links up. But that's a plus, because you're at liberty to draw on everything that's been done in the area. You can take all the images that have been used and use them again. They belong to all of us."

How accessible is that kind of literature to people who haven't read any sf? "You can't second guess them. It's very nice when you've written a book like *Plenty* and people who haven't read sf like it, despite it being steeped in science fiction history; not just books, but comics and movies. There's a *Mekon* in there, for goodness sake! And cyberpunks, people with jacks in the back of their necks. Yet, somehow, it's not inaccessible to other people, even though they've never read a book with a spaceship on the cover in their lives before."

"One of the things I realized when I started writing space opera, and *Plenty* is space opera, was that the difference between it now and the space opera written before was that now things have brand names. It isn't just style, a matter of spraying a decal on; it's that things have origins. You don't have boilerplate spaceships with generic fittings anymore. The fittings are actually made by somebody. They exist within a system of commerce and resources which we live in ourselves and recognize."

Greenland believes William Gibson did more to bring this about than anyone else. "Even more than Ballard. If you look in Ballard there are certain brand names, for want of a better word, but a lot more generic stuff. Ballard will tell you somebody is wearing aviator sunglasses. Gibson will tell you what brand. He raised our consciousness about our surroundings and demonstrated that you don't have to shut out contemporary reality in order to read and write science fiction."

"The major writers of the 70s were following authors like Ursula Le Guin, who was taking people and putting them in a totally alien context. They asked what the universal constants are and what makes us human. They posed the question, 'When we go to the stars, what are we going to take with us?' Gibson says, 'Our walkmans and sunglasses.'"

Colin Greenland's *Take Back Plenty* is published in paperback by Grafton at £4.99.

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# Off the Track

## David Garnett

**T**hey drove on down the road. Stretching ahead to the horizon, it was straight and empty. An hour had passed since they'd seen another vehicle; an hour before that, they'd taken the wrong road.

Michael had realized his mistake almost at once but had said nothing. It would make little real difference.

He kept his speed down. If they went any faster, the cracks and potholes in the road shook the car too much. Not that he cared about the hired car, but there was no hurry. They were on holiday—or supposed to be.

"There's nothing," said Angela, as she turned the radio dial. "Nothing."

Michael heard all kinds of different sounds fading in and out between the crackles of interference—news reports, advertising and sports commentary; a string quartet, a choir singing hymns and a swing band—but Angela switched the radio off and leaned back in her seat.

He watched from the corner of his eye as she looked down at the book in her lap and turned the page. Michael couldn't believe Angela was as bored as she pretended. She kept complaining about the heat, saying that they should have hired a car with air conditioning; but he knew she wouldn't have complained about the heat if she'd been stretched out on a beach. Her window was wound down, and the hot desert wind blew her hair back.

Angela could be on the beach again in a few days when they went back, but this was his part of the holiday, something he'd always wanted to do.

He had not been disappointed. The desolate landscape and the distant rock formations were even more spectacular than he'd imagined. He liked everything about the place; he even liked the potholed road.

Driving was meant to be like this, without long queues, without being jammed solid in a city street. Back in Britain, there was nowhere he could have driven as far without having to stop. The same was true wherever he'd travelled in Europe.

They had driven through Holland and Germany, France and Spain and Portugal, but always in their own car. This was the first time Michael had driven a left-hand drive vehicle, and he was surprised how soon he got used to it. Angela had refused to drive, another demonstration of her feelings about this part of the holiday.

"Town coming up," said Michael, as he saw the signpost at the side of the road. He glanced at the fuel gauge. It was still half full, but it was best to keep the tank filled up. "Maybe we should get some petrol."

Angela said nothing.

"Could do some shopping," he added.

Angela turned her head. He couldn't see her eyes because of her dark glasses.

"Shopping?" she said. "Shopping!"

Then she smiled and swiped at his shoulder.

"You English? I make you a deal!" said Michael, and Angela laughed.

"How big's this town?" she asked. "Two houses or three?"

"Horses, did you say, or houses?"

Angela kept looking at him. "You're enjoying yourself, aren't you?"

He nodded. "But you're not?"

She shrugged, then studied the silver bracelet around her wrist, lightly rubbing at the turquoise stone with her thumb.

"Some of it is all right," she said. "I suppose."

Even after so long together, Michael was always amazed how much Angela could say in a few words. Almost as much as she could say with a single look.

As far as she was concerned, they could have returned an hour after crossing the border. By then she'd bought everything she wanted from the handful of tourist shops clustered on the northern side of the frontier. Michael had to admit that it all seemed good quality stuff, and of course the prices were ridiculously cheap. Tourists had only been allowed in very recently, and they'd had to buy their visas before they left Britain.

When it came to shopping, Angela was an expert; she could find what she wanted almost immediately. She had bought hand-crafted jewellery and woven rugs to take back as gifts. Michael had restricted her to the number of rugs they could fit in a large suitcase, but told her to buy as much jewellery as she wished—and not to forget herself. Angela had tried to persuade him to buy a pair of fancy leather boots, but Michael knew he would never wear them. To keep her happy, he bought a snakeskin belt. He would never wear that, either, but at least it was less bulky and a lot cheaper.

**T**hat had been yesterday morning, and they had spent the night in an approved hotel. Michael had filled the fuel tank before they crossed the border, and again where the Volkswagen had been garaged for the night.

"If nothing else," said Angela, "perhaps we can get some lunch. Even if they don't have petrol, they've got to eat."

"You want to risk it?"

"It can't be worse than some of the food we've eaten abroad, and it will be a lot cheaper. We've got to try the local cuisine while we're here."

They had enough food, a packed lunch prepared at the hotel; but maybe Angela was finally coming to terms with this trip.

"Just don't drink the water," said Michael, as one of them always did wherever they went. "I wouldn't even put it in the radiator."

Angela nodded, then glanced back at Michael. "Air-cooled engine, right?" she said. "I just wish this air would cool me." She fanned her face with her book, then gazed out of the windscreen as they neared the town.

They had driven through several similar small towns, and compared to those in Europe the roads were all very wide, even the side streets, and the buildings were set far apart. None of them were very tall, many of them only single-storey. There was no need to build up when it was easier to build out. If there was one thing in surplus here, it was land.

Michael wondered what possible reason there could be for a town out here in the wilderness. Why had it ever been settled? Which came first, the road or the town? Almost every building was built of wood. Nothing looked new, nothing looked old. A decade or a century, it made little difference. A swirl of dust blew across the street ahead of them, a reminder that the desert was waiting to reclaim the whole area.

It only took a minute to reach the centre of town, and the road was lined with shops on either side. At least half of them were boarded up or derelict. Michael saw two other vehicles going by in the opposite direction, one of them a pickup truck, the other a battered old saloon. The driver of the first stared, the driver of the second raised a hand in greeting. Michael started to wave back, but he was too late.

He noticed two petrol pumps on the other side of the road, and he took his foot off the accelerator.

"Is that garage open?" he asked.

"It looks deserted."

"That might not mean anything. They won't get many customers."

As he drove past, he saw that the door to what might have been the workshop was open.

"There!" said Angela. "I saw someone inside."

"We'll give it a try."

He checked his mirror. There was nothing behind. There had been nothing behind since the border. He did a U-turn and pulled into the forecourt. A huge black and white dog was lying in the shade on one side of the petrol pumps. It didn't move when Michael halted on the other side.

"Got any petrol?" Michael said to the dog.

It opened its eyes, then closed them again.

"Maybe it's self-service," said Angela.

"I'm not going to risk it. Are you?"

He stretched back in his seat, trying to see into the workshop. There was a vehicle up the ramp inside. There were plenty of other vehicles around, but all of them were on flat tyres or without wheels. In such a climate, it would take a long time for them to rust.

He heard a chatter of voices and leaned back. There were three or four children at Angela's door, their hands thrust in through the window. Two more appeared next to him, begging.

"Ignore them," he said.

Angela opened her purse and started handing out coins.

"All right, ignore me," muttered Michael, as the two children at his window ran around to join the others.

He straightened his tie, opened the door and stepped out of the car. Then he noticed a shadow on the ground, and he turned around quickly, taking a step back when he saw the man only two yards away from him.

"Petrol?" he said quickly. "Have you any petrol?"

**T**he man was tall and lean, wearing an oily vest and stained denim trousers. He stared at Michael, then looked at the car. He touched the shiny new metal with his grimy fingers. When he drew back, there were greasy fingerprints on the wheel arch. He bent down and started to wipe the paintwork with the rag he was holding. His hand became still when he noticed Angela in the passenger seat. He stared at her for a few seconds, then finished cleaning the dirt and stood up. He walked around the car, studying it, then looked at the number plate at the front.

Michael wondered if the man had understood him. Carefully, he repeated: "Have you any petrol?"

"Gas," Angela told him.

"Have you any gasoline?"

"Nice car," said the man.

"It's hired," Michael said quickly.

"Where you folks from?"

"England."

The man nodded slowly, then spat on the windscreen.

Michael took a deep breath and wondered how quickly he could get back into the car and drive away.

Then the man leaned towards the bucket by the pumps and picked up the wash rag. He began to clean the windscreen – and Michael slowly exhaled.

He seemed quite old; but his face was so lined and weatherbeaten, it was hard to be sure of his true age. His hair was still thick, although almost totally grey.

"Out of here!" he yelled at the children, flicking water at them.

They ran off, laughing, and Angela climbed out of the Volkswagen. The man's eyes followed as she walked over towards the dog. Michael wanted to tell her not to touch the animal, but he knew it would make no difference. She stroked the dog's head, and its tail began to beat lazily against the ground, sending up clouds of dust.

"What's his name?" she asked.

"Dunno," said the man.

Angela glanced up at him.

"But I call him Duke," he added, and he smiled.

"Dook? Oh, Duke!" She laughed and rubbed at the dog's ears. "Are you a good boy, Duke? Are you? Aren't you handsome? Yes, you are. Yes, you are."

Angela was crazy about dogs. Michael had married her five years ago, and her boxer had been the dowry. It had taken a long time for Michael to persuade her to leave the animal in kennels so that they could go away for foreign holidays. These three weeks were the longest time she had ever been separated from her dog – and this would probably be the last time Michael and Angela would be alone together for a very long time. Their first child was due in six months.



The dog rolled over onto its back, its legs in the air. The man looked at Michael, then back at Angela.

"Yessir," he said, as he finished washing the screen, "I've got gas. Even got an electric pump. You got vouchers?"

Michael nodded and reached for his wallet, pulling out several petrol vouchers. They had been overprinted in red: *Tourist Issue Only Federal Penalty For Illegal Use*. He'd had to buy them at the border, paying in advance for any fuel he would use. He had tried to calculate how many gallons they might need, converting imperial gallons and estimating fuel consumption, only to discover that he had to buy a minimum number of vouchers.

The same was true of the currency; both of them had exchanged travellers cheques for the minimum of twenty thousand dollars in cash. Once they returned to the frontier, they would have to surrender any dollars and fuel vouchers they had left. There were no refunds.

Michael found it strange that all American banknotes were exactly the same size and colour, whatever the denomination. Inflation was finally down to under a hundred percent a year, however, and before too long the currency must surely be revalued to reflect its relative stability.

"Okay," said the man. "You want it full?"

"Please."

He unscrewed the fuel cap, unhooked the hose from one of the pumps and slid the nozzle into the filler. Setting the trigger onto automatic, he walked to the rear of the car.

"England, huh?" he said. "I spent an hour or two in Scotland once, changing planes." He opened the back of the Volkswagen. "But I spent much longer in Germany." He pulled out the dipstick, wiped it with a cloth, slid it back, pulled it out again, nodded.

"They make these in Mexico now," said Michael.

"I know."

"That's where we hired this."

"I know. They're beginning to build cars in America again, I hear." He pushed the boot shut.

He turned to face Michael, looking him directly in the eye for the first time.

Michael felt he had to say something. "Were you on holiday in Germany?" he asked.

"In the army. I was conscripted in '58. Best time, when there was no war. Ten years later, and I'd probably be dead."

This time Michael could think of nothing to say.

The man shrugged. "That's all over now, I guess. We should never have been there, should never have done what we did. But what happened to us should never have happened, either."

**T**he fuel nozzle switched off, and the man pulled it part way out. He gently squeezed the trigger, rounding off the figures on the pump dial, then replaced the nozzle in its slot.

"How much?" Michael asked.

"Twelve hundred bucks."

Michael counted out twelve vouchers and handed them over. He ought to pay more, as a tip, but he felt guilty about doing so. If he added another voucher, it would be as if he were trying to make up for what had happened – as though it were his personal

responsibility. He wondered if he should give the man a hundred dollars for washing the windscreen, and he opened the other part of his wallet.

The man realized what Michael was doing, and he shook his head. "That's okay," he said, and he turned to look at Angela. The dog was licking the back of her hand.

"Angela," said Michael, "we'd better leave."

"We've got to go now, Duke," she told the dog, and she stood up. "Is there anywhere we can get a cup of tea?" she asked the man. "A proper cup. Hot, with milk and sugar."

"A cup of tea?" He smiled. "No, ma'am, I doubt it. But I've just made some coffee, and you're welcome to a cup."

"We'd better leave," Michael reminded her.

"That's very kind of you," she said. "We'd love a cup of coffee."

"Come on through into the house." The man turned and walked away.

"Angela," said Michael, waving her towards the car.

"Michael," said Angela, and she gestured towards the service station. She began following the man.

Michael drummed his fingers on the roof of the car for a few seconds, wound up the windows and locked the doors. He quickly combed his hair, then followed Angela. They went around the back of the garage. A one-storey clapboard house stood there, surrounded by even more derelict cars and trucks.

"Come on in," said the man. "You'll have to excuse the mess, but I'm packing up. I'll soon be gone."

"Where are you going?" asked Angela, as she followed him through to the kitchen. A pot of coffee was simmering on the stove.

"Tennessee. Always said I'd go back there some day. Now's as good a time as any."

"Were you born there?"

"No, born in Mississippi. My folks moved to Tennessee when I was thirteen. Here, take a seat." He lifted a pile of magazines from a chair, and Angela sat down.

Despite his annoyance, Michael found himself fascinated by what little the man had said. Tennessee. Mississippi. They had always seemed to be names from some ancient myth, but meeting someone who had lived there was almost like becoming part of the legend.

"Ever since I was a child," said Michael, "I've always wanted to visit the U.S.A."

"Uh-huh."

Michael's abiding images of America had been of Westerns, the exotic landscapes of prairies and deserts, of mesas and buttes – and that was exactly what he'd discovered in Arizona.

"How long have you been here?"

"About ten years. After the army, I moved to Texas to work in the oil industry." He laughed for a moment, but there was no humour in his voice. "When we had an oil industry."

Texas, thought Michael, another evocative name.

"But you weren't there when...when..."

"No. I was up in Colorado on a fishing vacation with some buddies. Lucky, I guess." He was standing by the sink, washing out tin mugs. "You folks got any kids?"

Angela and Michael glanced at each other, both knowing what the man must have been remembering.

"Not yet," said Angela. She licked her lips. "You?"

"Two, a boy and a girl. Their momma and me, we split up. She took them with her to California." He

paused. "Los Angeles."

When there was a Los Angeles, thought Michael, but he remained silent. So did Angela. The man poured them both a cup of coffee, boiling hot and very strong.

"I'm working on my truck right now," he said.

"Soon as everything's ready, Duke and I are gone."

"Will you be able to carry all your belongings?" asked Angela.

"All that I need. What I can't carry, I'll leave or try to sell. You interested in buying anything?"

The man was smiling, but he meant what he said.

"Thank you, but I don't think so," said Michael.

"What have you got?" said Angela.

"All kinds of junk," said the man.

"Authentic American souvenirs, you mean," she told him.

"Exactly. You're welcome to take a look around."

Angela's eyes widened. "What's for sale?" she asked.

"Everything. Even Duke."

She looked at him sharply.

"Except Duke," he amended.

Michael knew he couldn't win. He sipped at his coffee — and he didn't like that, either.

Angela gazed around the kitchen, at the old crockery and the dented pots, but Michael was certain there was nothing here that she wanted. Even if there were, he would throw it out as soon as she wasn't looking. He didn't want any of this stuff in his house, and Angela certainly couldn't give any of it as presents.

"We can't take anything bulky," he told her. "It's only a small car, remember. And we have to think of our luggage allowance on the flight."

"Take your time." Somehow the man had managed to finish his scalding coffee. "I'll be out front if there's anything you find." He left the kitchen.

"Angela," said Michael, "you can't be serious. There's nothing here you can possibly want."

"Probably not, but I want to look around. Give me your wallet."

Michael did as he was asked. "Hurry up," he said.

He poured his coffee down the sink and picked up one of the magazines from the stack on the floor. It was a motoring magazine, quarter of a century old. He wondered if they were worth much. Even if they were, they were too heavy to take back to Britain.

It was too hot to remain in the room, and Michael let the magazine fall back, then left the kitchen. He turned right into the hallway. There was another door at the end, and he pushed it open.

The room was filled with junk, real junk, all kinds of obsolete household electrical equipment, most of it dusty and dismantled. There was a pile of old paperbacks on top of a doorless refrigerator. Michael picked up a few and glanced at the covers. They were all Westerns. He put them back, but the top one fell to the floor. Bending down to retrieve it, he saw something narrow wedged between a vacuum cleaner and the blade of a broken fan. He didn't recognize the object, so he pulled it free. It was only an old record, he realized, as he brushed the dust from his sleeve.

There couldn't have been anything of value in the house. House? It was more like a shack. If there were anything, the man wouldn't have left them alone in the place. Or maybe that was the whole idea. What if

he claimed that Michael and Angela were trying to rob him? He probably had a gun somewhere. All Americans had guns. He might have gone for it now so that he could threaten them. It was time to get out of here.

"Angela!" he yelled, and turned to leave the room. "Angela!"

The man was standing in the hallway.

"What have you got there?" he asked.

"Nothing," said Michael, then he noticed he was still holding the record.

"Is that what you want?"

"Er... yes."

"What is it?"

Michael studied it for the first time. The label was visible through a circular hole in the paper cover.

"Rock around the Clock," he read. "*Bill Haley and his Comets.*"

"Rock around the Clock!" laughed the man. "Number one in the hit parade! Didn't know I still had that. I remember buying it in Memphis. Shit, must have been nearly forty years ago! Look, I even wrote my name on the sleeve."

"You should keep it," Michael tried to hand the record back.

The man hesitated, then shook his head. "It's no good to me. I can't play it. But it's a real piece of American history, believe you me."

"Is it? One of those, er, long-playing records, is it?"

"No, it's a seventy-eight."

"Seventy-eight what?"

"Revs per minute. Forty-fives came in soon after, if I remember right."

"Ah, yes." When Michael was younger, a couple of his friends used to buy records.

"Rock and roll! God, what that meant to us when we were young. It was our symbol of rebellion, you know what I'm saying?"

Michael said nothing.

"No," said the man, looking him up and down, "maybe you don't. Our parents hated rock and roll, and radio stations banned it. But it was our music, and it was going to be our world. We felt that everything would be different from then on." He shrugged. "But it wasn't. I guess it never is."

He gazed at the record but his eyes were unfocused, and he was obviously remembering the past.

"How much?" asked Michael, to break the silence.

"It's priceless — and it's worthless. So take it. It's a gift."

"No, we'll pay," said Angela, suddenly appearing behind the man. "And I'd like this, and this, and this, if they're for sale."

She'd found a small lacquered box with tiny drawers, an oval mirror with a wicker frame and handle, and a crystal perfume spray.

"If you want them, ma'am, they're for sale."

"Five thousand dollars?"

The man stared at Angela in amazement.

"Not enough?"

"No. Yes, I mean. More than enough. Too much."

They ain't worth anywhere near that much."

"They are to me."

Angela counted the notes from Michael's wallet, handing them to the man. He tried to refuse, but Michael knew how difficult Angela was to dissuade.

"Is there anything else you want?" he asked, shaking his head in bewilderment. "Take anything." He looked at the money, and he smiled. "Take everything."

"We must be going," Angela told him. "Thank you for the coffee."

"You're welcome, ma'am."

He held out his hand, and Angela shook it. Michael backed away out of reach.

"Come on, Michael."

They left the house and began making their way back to the Volkswagen.

"Five thousand dollars?" whispered Michael.

"You know the rate of exchange. You earn that in a day. Come on, quickly."

"What's the rush?"

"I don't want him to find those petrol vouchers until we've gone."

Michael halted. "The what! How many did you leave?"

She tugged at his arm. "We've still got plenty. We don't need them all."

"But he won't be able to use them. They're only for tourists."

"He'll find a way if he has to," said Angela. She paused to stroke the dog, which was still lying in the same place. "Give me the keys, I'll drive."

She unlocked the door and carefully put the things she had bought on the back seat, then climbed into the car and opened the passenger door. It was roasting inside. Michael swung his door backwards and forwards, trying to force some cooler air into the vehicle. Angela slid the key into the ignition and started the engine. Michael sat down, closed his door and opened the window.

By then, the man was standing next to the driver's door.

"Where you heading for?" he asked.

Angela glanced at Michael.

"The Grand Canyon," he answered.

"You won't be disappointed." The man nodded.

"It's Tennessee for you?" said Angela.

"And Mississippi. I reckon it's time I visited my brother's grave again."

"He died when...er..." Angela's voice tailed away.

"Died at birth."

Michael noticed his wife's right hand leave the steering wheel and touch her stomach.

"He was my twin brother." The man wiped his forehead with the back of his arm. He seemed to study the town, but his gaze encompassed far more. "Sometimes I think he was the lucky one."

He and Angela looked at each other for a moment, and he said: "Have a good vacation, you hear?"

"We will," she said, nodding. "Goodbye."

The man waved as the car drove off into the street.

"This is America," said Michael. "They drive on the right."

The Volkswagen swerved to the other side of the road.

Angela glanced at Michael, then she grinned.

"Are you angry?" she asked.

"At giving away five thousand dollars to a complete stranger? Why should I be?"

But his anger was already ebbing away. For the first time Angela no longer seemed to resent that they were here, which was all that mattered.

They had only driven a few hundred yards when she suddenly braked and pulled the car into the side. She pointed across the road to the war memorial.

It stood in a small plot, surrounded by flowers. There was a fountain in one corner, a flagpole in another. There were still fifty stars on the American flag.

"It's like a tombstone," said Angela, softly.

In the centre was a simple slab of white marble, with carved lettering highlighted in black.

*In Memory of the One Million*

When the casualty list reached that high, official figures were no longer issued. Some said the total was one-and-a-half million American dead, others two million.

Two million dead in Vietnam, but that was nothing to the number who had died when the war suddenly reached the U.S.A. There was no memorial to them, and the death toll was even more speculative. Perhaps thirty million on the day that the missiles landed, perhaps twice as many in the years that followed. And there must have been at least as many fatalities in the Soviet Union.

"Why did they go when they knew they would be killed?" asked Angela.

"Orders. It was their duty."

"But it was all so stupid. What were they fighting for? What were they dying for? Why didn't anyone protest, try to stop the war?"

Michael didn't really know what she meant.

"They did try to stop the war," he said. "They dropped nuclear bombs on Hanoi."

"And look what happened! They were warned not to, but they went ahead. The whole world could have been destroyed. A lot of it was. And for what? For what?"

She turned towards Michael, and there were tears in her eyes.

"Let's get out of here," he told her. "Are you all right to drive?"

"Yes," Angela nodded. "It's just...just..."

She glanced at the memorial again, shook her head, then drove off.

"What are you going to do with that stuff?" he asked, hoping to change the subject. "Give it to someone you don't like?"

"What?"

"The stuff you got from Jesse G. Presley."

"How do you know his name?"

Michael was still holding the record, and he showed Angela the name written on the cover.

"I'm going to keep it all," Angela said. "But what are you going to do with that?"

"Nothing. What can we do with it? Do we know anyone with a gramophone?" He glanced at the title again. "Rock around the Clock."

"What does that mean?"

"Who knows? Who cares?"

Michael turned and threw the record onto the back seat, watching the town recede in the distance. He wished they had stayed on the right road, wished they hadn't stopped. Everything had been fine until then; but now it was almost as if there was something missing, and he had no idea what it could have been.

In silence, they drove on down the road. ●

# Mutant Popcorn

## Film Reviews by Nick Lowe

**T**he lawsuit's still pending as we go to press, but you'd have thought the whole fracas could be settled to the satisfaction of all parties simply by printing off a few thousand able-labels to append on the posters so the title reads Stephen King's *The Lawnmower Man* NOT. Presumably what's got America's No. 1 Man of Letters riled in this instance, when so many far direr versions of his work have been waved on with a smile, is not principally that the movie is a cynical attempt to take advantage of an understandable unoptioned title to purchase the royal name to stick over a completely different movie at the bargain price of simply writing in a bloke with a lawnmower. Rather, it's the fact that the producers picked up the story in a pack of three, and now they can afford to go off and do the same with the other two. Given that the *Night Shift* collection has generated more film deals than any other text in publishing history, you'd have thought by now he could afford to let a few go; but more importantly, the master's missing the point.

For this is a self-proclaimed celebration of virtual reality, where anyone can be anything they want to be so long as it's a gaudily-coloured but completely insubstantial illusion of something else. And 'that's a concept *The Lawnmower Man* has certainly embraced with enthusiasm, way over and beyond its cheeky simulation of virtual Stephen King by glueing new names and faces over the plot of *Corrie*. A team of more-than-usually virtual characters ("ever since her husband died she's been desperate for a good seeing-to") bump around a universe of staggeringly virtual plot ("I'll just leave the widow and kid parked here in the jeepardymobile while I go and set the timer on the ending bomb somebody left for no given reason in an unlocked van in my drive"), dictating exposition into captain's log when alone and mouthing unspcakably virtual dialogue whenever two or more are gathered together (relationship scene, clearly scripted by computer: "This is not a good time for me right now... I'm going through a lot of changes...") and occasionally giving themselves away with richly echoic clinkers (genius



Jeff Fahey in 'The Lawnmower Man'

scientist: "He learned Latin yesterday in under two hours. It took me a year just to learn the Latin alphabet!").

But just as meretriciously virtual, and in the end just as disarming, is this whole gimmick claim of "The UK's First Virtual Reality Movie" – which turns out, of course, to mean it's just like *Tron* except that characters keep sticking their hands in front of the shot. There's something delightfully paradoxical about the whole conceit of representing the illusion of VR on film – a medium that's had a whole century to refine itself into a considerably more convincing immersive simulation of experience than any, erm, real VR system has managed so far. It's even arguable that movies have already achieved a degree of interocitiveness way ahead

of existing VR systems; experiment will show, at least, that if you diligently wave your hand back and forth in front of the screen you'll be rewarded by a convincingly realistic sensation of being forcibly crashdived on to the pavement. (Mind you, as in so much else the real world down south has long outpaced the technology-bound imagination of the increasingly virtual north. During my absence from these pages I got a taste of truly interactive cinema in Matlapaneng, Botswana, where not only were the white and Native African sectors of the audience evidently watching completely different films off the same print of *The Wor of the Roses* – which already looked as if it had been previously used to floss a rhino – but the



reel changes took anything up to half an hour while the entire audience bunked off to the bar to drift back, consciousness substantially altered, at arbitrary narrative points through the following reel. I'd like to be able to describe the experience of *Death Mask of the Ninja* at the Bulawayo drive-in, but I still can't be sure it wasn't all a deranged dream.)

In fact, the VR stuff, while obviously shrewdly judged and timed for the transient audience, is itself little more than a glossy commercial veneer, and quite marginal to what *The Lawnmower Man*'s centrally about, which is the far more interesting and unfailingly tricky theme of superenhanced intelligence. The movie's otherwise wholly idiotic premise, that IQ could actually be boosted by non-stop subsection to immersive video effects, is simply an inventive ruse to make this notoriously unvisual (and unbankable) scenario spectacularly cinematic. If you strip away the visual glitter, much the most impressive parts of the film are the scenes where Jeff Fahey's quondam halfwit starts to accelerate past his mentor's level of brainpower, and sets about consuming information and experience in the usual Charly Gordon manic rush ahead of the inevitable awful disintegration when things start to screw horribly out of control. To be sure, there isn't much room in the low-level script and acting for close human investigation of this process, but there are still some shrewd and

convincing touches that don't appear in the literary benchmarks.

Where the bimbo wife in Poul Anderson's *Brain Wave* signalled her intellectual awakening by picking up a 19th-century novel, and even the narrator of *Camp Concentration* starts to groove annoyingly off on Messiaen, Fahey's long-abused "Jobe" (oh yes, dead subtle, that) is convincingly oblivious to cultural gradations – consuming frantic fragments of anything and everything as his player pops discs in and out like a broken toaster, while the gap between his intelligence and his actual experience opens out into a deadly moral chasm of yawning simplicities. It's not the business of such opportunistic entertainment to do more than skate these adult ambiguities, but they do give this otherwise pretty virtual stuff a gratifying handhold on reality – something otherwise best not thought about too closely, lest you catch yourself wondering stickily about the uncomfortable practicalities of virtual shagging, and for that matter whether it really would be all that much fun if your faces stuck together like that.

A touch of the lawnmower might well have done favours to *Memoirs of an Invisible Man*, John Carpenter's desperate attempt to turn H.F. Saint's inept, meandering novel into a competent movie. It certainly can't be faulted for lack of trying; indeed, I can't remember ever seeing a

picture that bore such insistent and pervasive signs of trying. The writing credits alone acknowledge that what you see on the screen is, mind-bogglingly, what was left after the script was fixed by William Goldman (presumably substantially, if he qualified for a credit under Writers' Guild regs); and the I-love-this, I-hate-that restaurant dialogue that carries his handwriting most clearly is itself one of the most preposterous devices ever contrived to last-ditch some personal data on to its two vacuous leads, and gives some idea of the kind of cleanup job he faced. But sympathy must rest with anyone saddled with the duty of making a movie from the novel at all. The wounds where whole gatherings have been ripped out of the book, and the bleeding stigmata of where the rudiments of a plot have been nailed in on top, are still poignantly visible in revealing outbursts of dialogue ("I'm not sure playing the stockmarket so you can live like a recluse [as in the novel] is the best solution") and frantic paperhanging over the holes ("You told George you were invisible?" – "Nah, I just made up some bullshit story"). Desperate predicaments, like a wad of gum plugging a hole in the novel where the ending should be, call for desperate solutions; and if that means the film characters have to shin unprompted up a tall building with girders sticking out the top the moment they sense the movie hitting the eighty-minute mark, then so be it.



Jenny Wright in 'The Lawnmower Man'

But it's never enough, because the seeds of self-destruction lie deep, deep in the material. The mere decision to keep the novel's awkward title forces the film to import the disastrous baggage of a first-person voiceover, laboriously informing us of Chevy Chase's state of mind whenever there seems a doubt about his emotional range as a performer ("I remember feeling an enormous sense of relief..." or the credibility of his motivation ("By now I was in such a state of shock I was panicky", &c.). There's enough enjoyable touches, especially directorial, to keep some of it ticking: the opening gag about the march of effects technology, the artful now-you-do now-you-don't games of viewpoint, and of course the seemingly unembarrassable Sam Neill wheeling out his David Owen character one more glorious time. It's a notable advance on the book that nobody makes even a token attempt to construct a rational account of the invisibility effect (or the old favourites about how he can see with a transparent retina and stuff); and the film does come up with some improved gag situations, and the inevitable (mostly rather lame) genre jokes at the Claude Rains tradition. (Any invisible viewers-at-home should however be warned that, if you're seriously trying to stay alive, tipexing your teeth is definitely not an advisable cosmetic strategy.) But all too many of the real pleasures are as presumably inadvertent as the resonant naming of Neill's henchman: "I will cut off your testicles and lightly fry them, and Morrissey here will have them for lunch." It's not quite enough to entertain on its own terms, but if you bring the right goggles you can keep yourself reasonably amused. That may not sound much, but in this sparkly new world of virtual entertainment it's increasingly up to us to make our own fun or starve.

(Nick Lowe)

## Tube Corn

### TV Reviews by Wendy Bradley

**B**ob Peck, I can personally testify, can't half act. I have seen him in the theatre a couple of times: I nearly had a hernia laughing at his Malvolio and I hissed, boomed, laughed and cried when he played Sir Mulberry Hawk and John Brownie in *Nicholas Nickleby*. On television he was, of course, Craven in *Edge of Darkness* and he almost did make me believe the black flowers were coming to get us.

So what on earth possessed them to

cast him in the thirtysomethings-get-BSE saga *Natural Lies*? Especially when it was being broadcast at the same time as *Edge of Darkness* was being rebroadcast? Do you think it was a kind of zen thing; you know, it was just his karma that he was going to get to play the same character twice in one week; or was the scheduling as deliberate as the casting?

For, yes, the perceptive *Interzone* reader will have at once recognized that *Natural Lies* was trying to do for mad cow disease what *Edge of Darkness* did for nuclear power, ie to convince us that Something is Going On and that They aren't going to let Us know anything about it but are prepared to kill people to cover up the fact that their products are killing people and, even worse, to mess with the heads of thirtysomethings while they're about it. Well, all right, forty-somethings this time.

The difference is that when *Edge of Darkness* messed with Peck's head it was to reflect his character Craven's grief at his daughter Emma's murder. Joanne Whalley-Kilmer slid in and out of the story as Emma's ghost in an immediately shocking but ultimately credible way; pushing at the constricting edges of television naturalism but for a purpose. And the weird things that happened to Craven began, by the end of the story, to make a kind of self-contained sense of their own. Jedburgh lives!

In *Natural Lies*, though, weird things happen because They are making them happen, and so far (yes, I have only seen the first two episodes at the time of writing) They seem to be messing with Peck's head out of mindless sadism; not even the gleeful sadism of the nuclear bad guys in *Edge of Darkness* but simply in order to demonstrate that they are the Bad Guys. Casting is no substitute for intelligent plotting, the creation of suspense and whizzo special effects, and if I were Bob Peck I'd want my agent to specify I wasn't going to appear as a signal of millennial doom ever again.

As someone who went vegetarian marginally before the first BSE scare stories broke I was looking forward to feeling smug during *Natural Lies* and, yes, I had to watch the slaughterhouse footage from behind the sofa or between my fingers going "can I look yet?" Are you seriously telling me you guys eat that stuff? Yet *Natural Lies* isn't going to make anyone become vegetarian because it doesn't have any punch. The conspiracy theory only makes good television if it is an unexpected conspiracy so that the good guys have a chance of foiling the bad guys and you can do a nail-biting palm-sweating ending, or else if it is a calmly outrageous conspiracy played with relish like the *Edge of Darkness* plot.

It helps if you can get Clapton to do your soundtrack, too.

**A**nd now for something completely different: competition time!

Last month I told you about the BBC Video of the "lost" Dr Who story, *Shado*. This month I have seen a review copy and can report that it works surprisingly well with linking narration from Tom Baker to glue the plot together. The material filmed in 1979 holds up well too – so well that all Douglas Adams readers will immediately recognize Professor Chronotis' rooms from *Dirk Gently* and will be doing the gag about the sugar along with the cast. There is the well remembered mix of the outrageous line that is just this side of unplayable ("He's beating his heart in Gallifreian Morse!") and the outrageous business that is just that side of too twee to live (the Doctor pedals furiously down a Cambridge street to escape the deadly floating mind-sucking globe through a bunch of busking swingle singers performing the *Chattanooga Choo Choo*). Anyway, you might be able to judge the video for yourself as I have two copies to give away.

Now I'm sick of the whingeing about the last competition being too hard so this time those of you who have been hanging on to my every word for the last few months (large hint) should find this easy. Answer these three questions on a postcard and I'll put the correct entries into a hat and pick out two winners. The questions:

- (1) What goes ping! whirr! pop!
- (2) What goes nada dada nada dada?
- (3) What goes doom tekka tekka

tekka doom tekka tek?

**F**inally, the winners of our first competition. You will remember that you had to write an excerpt from *Lord of the Rings*, *Hitchhikers Guide* or *Journey into Space* in the style of any of the others. I only have space to print one of the two winners, but congratulations to **Elizabeth Counihan** and runner-up **Alastair Grey Gunn** who have received copies of the *Journey into Space* cassettes. Elizabeth's entry:

**CUE** Rocket taking off followed by music (B-movie Bartok)

**Announcer** (Sounds like elderly disc jockey talking into baked-bean tin): The BBC presents Frodo Baggins in **THE LORD OF THE RED PLANET**. Captain Baggins and his companions Doc and Sammy are racing to save Middle Earth from invasion by the Martian Lord, unaware that they carry with them an agent of the Red Planet – the Evil Collum...

**CUE** Three chord sequence going Plink, Plank, Plonk and noise like dialling tone (to signify passage of time) **Sommy** (Sounds like hysterical Jewish cockney): 'Ere Frodo, I think there's something very queer about Collum. The way 'e looks at yer with them eyes. Gives me the creeps.

Frodo (sounds like hammy Labour MP): He's a first rate worker, Sammy. Come here Gollum, what have you to say for yourself?

Gollum (sounds like John Major): Yes, Master. Orders must be obeyed without question at all times.

Frodo: There, what did I say, perfectly normal. I can't think what's got into everyone. Just because we sometimes talk backwards like characters from a Nordic Saga and all have horrible nightmares...

Doc (sounds like American version of Michael Hordern): Speak not of Evil Dreams, Frodo. They betoken the presence of the Nameless One. Dark he is and...

Sommy: Now you're at it Doc. Talking of 'orrible dreams, what's that on the scanner? It's got bits sticking out, and its all curvy. I think it's a woman! 'Ere what on earth are we going to do now? Frodo: I don't know Sammy. I just don't know...

Well done. Entries for this month's competition to Shada Competition at the main Interzone address, on a postcard, by 1st October 1993.

(Wendy Bradley)

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## Interaction

Continued from page 5

Dear Editors:

I first bought Interzone eight months ago, from my local newsagent and shortly thereafter placed a regular order with him for it. (Newsagents have to live too, and he is a friend, hence no direct subscription.) What attracted me was the heading "Science Fiction and Fantasy," and since you first mentioned it I have been looking forward to your "fantasy" issue, which I have just finished reading.

You ask if there is a real demand for "pure fantasy" stories. Clearly and emphatically yes! Whether there is enough demand to warrant a sister magazine concentrating on fantasy is, of course, a commercial decision you are better qualified to answer than I am, but I must say that I would be disappointed at such a step. True, I personally would like to see more fantasy than at present but I accept that you must keep a balance which satisfies the majority of your readers, within the constraints of the material available at any given time.

In my opinion, after 30+ years reading both genres, "The Sculptor" and "The Unluckiest Thief" were both pure fantasy and excellently done, particularly Kilworth's story.

The presence of unicorns in "The Land of Purple Flowers" did not alter the fact that the conception was basically science fiction. "The Dumpster" was also an sf story, but neither story was any less enjoyable for that.

"Orchards of the Moon" was a true "Science Fiction and Fantasy" story, i.e. both elements were necessary to the success of the tale and Mr Baxter should be congratulated on the way he mixed the two.

**R. Ingram**  
Bishopton, Scotland

Dear Editors:

"Interface" issue 60 - Sf v Fantasy content: I feel there is a growing demand for this type of material as the demarcation line between the two seems to be becoming more blurred. Sf readers who would once have sneered at the idea of reading fantasy fiction are being painlessly exposed to it through such media as issue 60 and the number of films that have been around in recent years, and are not only increasing their tolerance, but learning to like it! Personally, I like this issue very much indeed, but then I'm prejudiced in favour of "light, upbeat" content anyway, as I think I've written to you before. My response to the fiction and interviews is that both are excellent.

Gender balance - "Interface" issue 60. (Passing thought: would Messrs Donaldson, Brooks and Asprin agree with your "Alos" prefacing the "they all happen to be men..." remark?) Thinking back over the last few issues, you do seem to bring up this question rather a lot - is this personal or in response to reader pressure? As an IZ minority group (i.e. a 40-year-old woman!) I like to see women making their way and achieving overdue recognition in this, as in every other, sphere of life: however, let's be realistic in acknowledging the balance between male/female contributors - you can only print what's submitted, after all. I enjoy good writing first and foremost, and couldn't really care less about the writer's anatomical differences as long as (s)he has me riveted to my seat.

For those who think there's a discernable difference between male/female writers, how about a "test" issue - all materials to appear anonymously, with full credit given in the following month's issue. Guesses as to gender submitted on a postcard and a "booby" prize for the winner. That might help sort the men from the boys, so to speak!

**Susanne Leeson**  
Bollington, Cheshire

Dear Editors:

In regard to Interzone 60, and that list of women in fantasy:

P.M. Griffin is Pauline Griffin, and is definitely female.

Lyndon Hardy, however, I believe was named for Lyndon Johnson; at any rate, he's male. I think that's the only one you got wrong.

Mickey Zucker Reichert is definitely female; she's a doctor who writes in her spare time, & lo Conan Doyle. Last I heard she had her practice in rural Iowa.

J.F. Rivkin is two women; originally they worked in collaboration, but one of them moved a few thousand miles away. I'm told they both still write under the name J.F. Rivkin now.

I'm puzzled as to why you have Kathryn Grant listed under that name, since I've only seen her published under her maiden name, Kathryn Ptacek. Maybe I've just missed it.

You have a few names here I know only from short fiction, but the list is purportedly novelists; should I quibble? Not that I'm absolutely sure of them.

And what's the point of this list, anyway? If it's to demonstrate that there are plenty of female fantasy writers, I would think that was blindingly obvious without such documentation - in fact, in my experience the usual problem is convincing readers that fantasy is not an entirely feminine genre. I've heard it argued that the bestselling fantasy writers are all male because there are so few males writing fantasy that they stand out and draw undeserved attention!

I'd find a list of female writers of hard sf to be much more useful.

**Lawrence Watt-Evans**  
Goithersburg, Maryland

**Editor:** Thanks for your comments and corrections. The purpose of the list of female fantasy writers was to demonstrate that there are indeed many women active in the field despite the presence of a fairly large mole "oristocracy" which tends to hog the limelight (Eddings and Feist, Donaldson and Prochett, and many other best-sellers). As for a list of female authors of "Hard SF" - good idea. Would anyone care to start compiling such a list? We'd be grateful for readers' suggestions.

Dear Editors:

I believe that the new movement of socially-aware and experimental fiction is developing, despite difficult markets. This is why I have set up Barrington Books - to promote new writing by publishing a collection of original stories. Interested writers please send an SAE for a copy of our Manifesto to Chris Kenworthy, Barrington Books, Bartle Hall, Liverpool Road, Hutton, Preston, Lancs, PR4 5HB.

**Chris Kenworthy**  
Preston, Lancs.

# Maud

## David Wishart

I hadn't considered possible mechanical embarrassments until Maud got the staggers at the Duchess's conversazione.

The dear Duchess was too well-bred to remark on it, of course. Nonetheless, it is mortifying to see one's new-model Remington-Babbage Automatron suddenly jerk her cucumber sandwich into the aspidistra and set off sideways through the French windows.

I followed Maud into the garden and remonstrated with her.

"I do apologize, George," she said. "A minor hitch in a co-ordination sub-routine. I have corrected it, and it should not recur."

This was worrying. If it had happened once, then despite Maud's assurances it could happen again, possibly under even less auspicious circumstances. I made a mental note to ring the agency first thing in the morning.

The other question, however, was more immediate and could be dealt with at once.

"Don't you think, Maud," I said, "that 'George' is a rather overfamiliar form of address? Especially when we are in company."

"We aren't in company. We're five metres from the nearest person and tucked behind an aucuba japonica."

"You know perfectly well what I mean. In future you will please confine yourself to 'Mr Fetheredge'."

Her red optical sensors rested on me for a good two or three seconds. Then something went chunk inside her; yet more evidence, I thought, that she was due for readjustment (Remington-Babbage frown on the use of the word service in connection with their Automatra).

"Very well, Mr Fetheredge." She brushed away an intrusive fly with a flick of her peacock-feather fan. "If it amuses you."

Of course, her face was devoid of expression. One cannot expect technology, even in the last years of this amazing 19th century and after eight decades of automatization, to give titanium steel and plasmic the mobility of human flesh. Yet I felt that she was laughing at me, and it was most unpleasant. I cursed again the fad that had brought these Mechanical Partners onto the market and made them socially not only acceptable but de rigueur. I also (incidentally) cursed my nephew Rollo, who has far more guineas than brain cells, for inflicting her on me as a sixtieth-birthday gift.

"Very well, then," I said, taking her by the elbow.

"If you have recovered from your...aberration we shall return inside."

She lowered her optical sensors and brushed a stray leaf from the bosom of her velveteen dress.

"I'd rather not," she murmured.

Now, before we go any further, let me assure you that this is no Shavian fantasy. Deep as my respect is for the works of the great George Parnell Shaw (and of course his collaborator Mr Sullivan), I look on his operetta *Pygmalion* as a work of sheer, I might say crass, fiction. I give you my solemn oath that Maud was not, in some wild, weird automaton way, pining with love for me, nor will I lend this story with myself sitting alone in my room singing, "I've Grown Accustomed to her Face."

"I'd rather not" (to recap), Maud murmured.

There was a brief silence. Of course, this inclusion of the RIP (Random Irrational Preference) Factor in the Remington-Babbage Series MP129E has caused a certain amount of adverse comment, with which I heartily concur. Like many of the older generation, I prefer my automata to be tractable.

"You'd rather not?" I stepped back, scandalized.

"Why, for heaven's sake?"

"It's boring."

One can make only so many allowances for advanced technology. When it puts on airs it must be shown its place straight away. I prepared to take her soundly to task.

"Now let us be clear about this, Maud..." I began.

"I mean, why should they assume that just because I'm a machine I should have no worthwhile opinions?" She leant her bustle against the arm of the rustic seat behind us. "I'm sure I know just as much about conversation as the Duchess, for all her presidency of the Save the Iguanodon League. Yet when I venture a comment she only laughs and sucks on her cheroot. I wish to heaven we'd never come."

By this point, I was almost literally fizzing with anger. RIP was one thing, but I was not going to have my social life dictated by a jumped-up calculator.

As I reached down to switch her off, Arthur Grenville made his appearance round the edge of the aucuna.

"Having trouble?" he drawled, tossing aside his reefer.

Nor now I realize that the word "drawl" is hackneyed, especially in connection with young men of Grenville's type; but unfortunately in this instance it is the



not *juste*. Grenville did drawl. He also cast piercing glances from his gimlet eyes and smoothed his luxuriant moustaches with a well-manicured hand. Such realities are sent to try us.

"It's my Automaton," I said. "She's acting peculiarly."

He darted a piercing glance at Maud and fingered his moustache.

"Oh?" he said. "In what way?"

**T**his was, of course, professional interest. Grenville is one of the best up-and-coming psycho-engineers in the business.

I gave the usual, rather facile, layman's description of the symptoms, at which he grunted and nodded his head in that omniscient way common to all professionals.

"Switch her on again, would you?" he said.

I did so.

"Now, Maud," he said when she had straightened up. "Bessemer Test Six."

Maud went rigid, and he began his catechism.

"Red."

"Nineteen."

"Intractability."

"Sixteen point three. Ashes."

"Ulysses. Root point nine one four."

"Man."

It went on in a similarly incomprehensible vein for several minutes. Finally, Grenville said:

"End."

Maud seemed to give herself a mental shake. Then she stood up.

"I think I shall go in now," she said. "It has turned rather chilly and I have not brought my shawl."

With a nod to both of us she made her way back to the house. We watched as she disappeared inside.

"Well?" I said.

Grenville brought out his silver reefer case and offered me a joint. I took one (it was Korean, a Golden Moon Rising) and lit it: smoking may be expensive and unfashionable these days but it is a habit of which I cannot break myself.

"Absolutely nothing," Grenville drawled. "One hundred percent. Miye bil miye."

Perhaps it was the juvenile slang that did it; or perhaps it was the man's tone. Whichever it was, I felt intense irritation.

"Now look here," I said. "You're not telling me that that was normal behaviour for an automaton?"

He regarded me through the haze of smoke.

"The only thing that surprised me," he said, "was that she went back in of her own accord."

"But she said she was bored!"

"Exactly." He took out a joint of his own and tapped it on the silver case. "We've come a long way from the chess-playing Turk, you know."

"I'm sorry, I don't follow you."

He took time over his reply, while carefully lighting his Golden Moon Rising with a lucifer from a monogrammed box.

"In which areas," he asked finally, "does the human brain surpass the mechanical, would you say?"

I had not expected a question, and it caught me wrong-footed.

"I suppose," I brought out the stock layman's

answer, "in emotion and original thinking."

He examined the burning end of his reefer critically. "Automata have been capable of original thought for years. As for emotion – and I'd expand it to feelings in general – you might have been right eighteen months ago. Now I'm afraid you're wrong there as well."

I must admit I experienced mild outrage.

"My dear Grenville," I said. "You're not telling me that a thing of plasmic, steel and crystal can have feelings?"

"Why not, if a thing of carbon, oxygen and hydrogen has them?"

"That's nonsense! You're being sophistic!"

"And you are being elitist."

I shook my head, but said nothing. The argument was as preposterous as any Mr Dodgson could invent.

"You might have found it easier," Grenville went on, "if you'd been young enough, like me, to have had an automaton nanny. Oh, no," he held up his hand as I started to protest, "I'm not suggesting they're capable of affection. That would be nonsensical."

"Then what are you suggesting?"

I had spoken somewhat sharply, but Grenville seemed not to notice.

"Only that we children believed that they were," he said, "and so as adults can accept the possibility of feelings in other automata."

"But surely the RIP Factor is nothing but an electronic trick!"

"So the manufacturers think," Grenville stubbed out his reefer and tossed it into the shrubbery. "But you aren't the only one to notice a certain strangeness in your Automaton. Personally I consider it symptomatic."

I forget how the conversation ended; I rather think that I politely suggested he consult an alienist and we parted shortly thereafter. In any event, I thought no more about the matter until the following afternoon, when I was informed by telephone that Maud had chained herself to the railings of Number Twelve Downing Street.

**S**he was not alone, of course. There were three other automata along with her, not counting the dozen or so unchained ones who stood slightly apart holding banners. The constable on duty told me later, with a certain amount of chagrin, that the banner-waving group had decoyed him a little way down the street while Maud and her two colleagues had slipped in behind and fastened themselves in place.

By the time I arrived, a considerable crowd had gathered. It was largely good-natured, and consisted almost entirely of members of the lower classes, to whom the words on the banners might well have been Greek for all they understood them. To me, they made hardly more sense: *Intelligence is Not the Sole Preserve of Humanity* was one; *Allow Us Our Minds* another; and *End This Condescension* a third.

They were all Remington-Babbage MP129E's. That much was obvious – had it not been for Maud's sprigged green morning outfit I doubt if I could have told her apart from the others. As it was, it gave me an uneasy feeling as I pushed through the crowd to see fifteen pairs of red optical sensors identical to hers swivel in my direction.

I made myself known to the constable and moved to her side. Like the rest, she had been standing absolutely silently, but as I approached she said:

"Good afternoon, Mr Fetheredge."

"What the," I glanced around and saw that we were, of course, being observed, "deuce do you think you're playing at?"

"I should have thought it was obvious." She held up the length of chain that shackled her to the Prime Minister's railings. "I am engaged in a protest."

"But you're a machine!" I snapped. "Machines don't protest, Maud! Be reasonable!"

"That is exactly it." Her voice was maddeningly calm. "I am reasonable. If I were not, then there would be no need for protest."

Why I bothered to argue with her, I don't know. Perhaps because, again, I felt that she was laughing at me, and that simply to deactivate her would be to admit that she had a valid point."

"Surely you don't claim the power of human reason?" I said.

"Not human reason, no. That would be to deny my own nature. I am, as you rightly observe, a machine. However, Cogito, ergo sum applies equally in my case as in yours."

"Maud, you may think you think, but believe me that is an impossibility." There was something wrong with this, I knew, but I had not the leisure to rephrase it. "Being the product of a manufactory, your brain is no more capable of true thought than is a tin-opener."

"Then the created mind is by definition incapable of rationality?"

"Of course it is!"

"In that case," Maud said sweetly, "Mr Darwin must be correct after all."

This was too much. Insolence from automata I can tolerate, but when they begin to indulge in heresy the time has come to call a halt. I leaned over, switched her off and waited for the constable's colleague to arrive with a locksmith.

**T**hat was two weeks ago. The papers, of course, hardly mentioned the "protest," and I think we may safely regard the matter as closed. Maud herself, in common with the other MP129E's of my acquaintance, has been remarkably well-behaved since then, and I trust the affair has taught them a much-needed lesson. Indeed, so tractable has she become that I feel she may now resume the decorative purpose for which she was intended. Tomorrow is Derby day, and the Duchess has kindly invited me to be one of her party. Besides the obvious fact that anyone who is anyone (not to mention the society press) will be there, His Highness the Prince of Wales has a horse running. I think that, under the circumstances, the occasion is not one to be missed; and that when I inform Maud that she will be accompanying me I can depend on her wholehearted agreement.

**David Wishart** is a completely new British writer who lives in Carnoustie, Scotland. He tells us that he lived abroad (Kuwait, Greece, Saudi Arabia) for 11 years, before returning to the UK. He works as a freelance teacher, is married ("with two kids, a dog, two cats and two turtles") and has written a few stories for children.

**David Garnett** (see his story, pages 27-31), born 1947, has had three distinct careers. Firstly, he was a very young sf novelist, author of such books as *Mirror in the Sky* (1969), *The Starseekers* (1971) and *Time in Eclipse* (1974). Secondly, he was a prolific writer-for-hire of pseudonymous novels of all types (he doesn't talk about these). Thirdly, he re-emerged in the science-fiction field as Britain's leading anthologist of recent years, with the *Zenith* series, *The Orbit SF Yearbook* and, latterly, *New Worlds*.

## FOR SALE

**The Ultimate Guide to Science Fiction** by David Pringle (with assistance from Ken Brown). Hardcover edition, Grafton, 1990. A guide to some 3,000 sf titles, described by the *Oxford Times* as "among the four or five most useful books published in this field in the last two decades." It sold quite well and there are just a few copies left. We are selling these to IZ readers at less than half the original price of £16.95 – £8 inc. p & p (£10 overseas; this offer not available to USA).

**Interzone: The 2nd Anthology**. Paperback edition, New English Library, 1988. Stories by J.G. Ballard, Gregory Benford, Thomas M. Disch, Garry Kilworth, Paul J. McAuley, Kim Newman, Rachel Pollack, John Shirley & Bruce Sterling, Brian Stableford, Ian Watson and others – fine tales which the *Times* described as having "the quality of going right to the edge of ideas which can chill as well as warm." It's now officially out of print, but we have obtained some remainder copies for resale to IZ readers at just over half the original cover price – £1.75 (including postage & packing; £2.75 overseas; \$5 USA).

**Earth is the Alien Planet: J.G. Ballard's Four-Dimensional Nightmare**. A monograph by David Pringle, Borgo Press, 1979. Covers all Ballard's work from "The Violent Noon" in 1951 up to the eve of publication of *The Unlimited Dream Company* in 1979. Still in print in the USA but long hard to obtain in Britain. Now copies are available from *Interzone* at £3.50 each (including postage & packing; £4.50 overseas; this offer not available to USA).

For any or all of these items please send a cheque or postal order for the appropriate amount to: *Interzone*, 217 Preston Drive, Brighton BN1 6FL, UK. You may also pay by Access (MasterCard) or Visa card: please send us your card-holder's name, address, card expiry date and signature.

# The Cast

## Nicholas Royle

**Z**sa had been coming to the weekly games for a while, so she was there when it happened. Possibly her presence had something to do with it, because I would have been trying even harder in order to impress her. But still, the point is you've got to be careful not to want something too much.

It was coming towards the end of the football season. Soon the authorities from whom we rented the pitch would be returning it to summer use by taking down the goalposts and corner flags. It was minor-league stuff, you see. We played in the park on Sunday mornings. But we were no less competitive than if we were playing in front of the Kippax or the Stretford End.

I was better in goal than any other position but that's not to say there was no room for improvement in my game. In fact, that was true for the whole team, even my mate Docs, who played at left-back. I would rather have called him by his real name, which was Dave, but everyone else called him Docs and I didn't want to appear different. That's important in a football team.

The average age was about 25 and the other teams we played in the local league tended to be a bit older, but we gave our best, always competing strongly for the ball. We were still bottom and because there were teams waiting to enter the league there was the threat of relegation. This game was important: if we lost we would almost certainly go down. If we drew we would still be in with a chance. But that's the lot of a goal-keeper in every match he plays: you can't win the game, only try and stop your team losing. So it was vital I kept the ball out of the net. It was up to the rest of them to score goals at the other end and given that we hadn't scored a single goal in the league all season, the pressure was on me to keep a clean sheet.

It was a bright cold day, winter sunlight sparkling in a few remaining frost patches, and our breath froze in front of our faces. Zsa had picked me up in her car and we arrived about the same time as Docs and a couple of others. We exchanged hellos and I introduced Zsa to Brian and Stud. She already knew Docs; the three of us had been out for a drink once or twice. I fell in step with him, talking about work and what a pain in the arse it was to work so hard you just felt like falling asleep when you got home, and Zsa walked with Stud and Brian. Stud didn't get his name for nothing. I found myself keeping an eye on them at the same time as trying to talk to Docs.

"We've got to win today," he was saying, but it hardly registered because I was watching Zsa.

I know what you're thinking: I'm one of those jealous, possessive types who watches his girlfriend whenever she talks to another man. I'm not actually, but you see the thing is I knew she was having an affair. Well, let's say I believed she was. I was sure of it. But I wouldn't have beaten her up or anything. I just wanted to know, so that I knew. That's fair, isn't it? I just wanted to know what was going on.

There are all sorts of signs. She stops listening half way through what you're saying. Her gaze wanders. She tells obvious lies for no apparent reason and you can tell when you know someone that well. You see it in their eyes, that subtle glaze. Sometimes she smells different. She took to eating mints.

But the thing was, I loved her. I really did. When I could see she was lying it hurt me. I was glad she'd come to watch the game because I knew she wasn't actually that keen on football. It meant something to me that she would be standing there.

**Z**sa had to wait outside while we went in to get changed. "I'll walk around," she said, leaning slightly towards me and not sure whether to kiss me or not. I felt a bit awkward in front of the lads and said, "OK. See you in a few minutes. We're on the top pitch." I ducked unnecessarily through the doorway.

The changing room was half full. Voices bounced off the walls. Taunts about professional football teams and the weekend's fixtures were tossed from man to man, across the bags and boots and shirts sitting in the middle of the floor. "Hi Cat," someone said. My nick name, after Peter Bonetti. "All right?" I answered, dumping my bag and squeezing between two bodies to get my arse on the bench. In the corner a discussion was going on. The subject was girls and what you would do if you found out someone was cheating on you, and as always in the changing room the exchanges were made at full volume.

"I'd give her an extremely hard time, then find out who he was and go and twat him," said Tim, a stocky Georgie who could outplay most of the opposition but always kept the ball too long and ended up losing it.

"I'd be so angry I wouldn't know what to do." This was Tommo, a gangling centre forward who looked impressive and nimble on the ball despite his height but invariably hooked his shots way over the bar. Not that I was in any position to criticize: the goal difference had always reflected my own lack of natural goal-keeping ability. I was mostly enthusiasm, part instinctive lunge and no real talent.

"What about you, Cat?"

I'd always thought I'd be sad rather than angry. I'd let go of the girl and have no interest in getting at the other man. What's the point? If someone wants to go, you let them, and if they've gone off with someone else you have to conclude they want to go. There's no point being angry. It's not as if you'd want to make them stay, because they've betrayed your trust. I don't know, maybe you can't buy this. Perhaps I was just too together to be true, but that's how I felt.

I shrugged. "I was thinking about the game," I said lamely.

"Where are my shin pads?" Docs asked. "Why do I lose everything? I've lost my shin pads."

It was true. He was always losing things. Someone threw him a spare pair.

I really had got myself quite worked up about this game. It was important we didn't lose, and because we almost never managed to score it was up to me to save the team from relegation. I love goalkeeping. There's something about the particular responsibility you feel as the last man. The thrill and the satisfaction of making a spectacular save far outweigh the excitement of scoring. Every keeper has a favourite type of save and although of course they should prefer for the opposition never to have a shot on goal they secretly long for an opportunity to try and make their favourite save. But they must achieve success in this or they'll be left crumpled in a heap in the six-yard box like last week's washing. Like every other keeper, I have a favourite. Or more to the point, a save which I have never quite made and have always wanted to make.

We were beginning to move out. The passageway out of the changing rooms was dark and echoing with the clatter of studs. Outside the sudden sunlight blinded me and I had to squint up the hill towards the pitches. We left behind the booming camaraderie of the changing rooms and broke into a trot. Voices got lost more easily out here in the tense cold air. I couldn't see Zsa anywhere but it shouldn't have mattered: I was with the others and soon we'd be playing, melded into a perfect group working together to one end. What better way to spend a Sunday?

"What will we do in the summer?" I asked Docs.

"Baseball," he replied softly. "Or softball. I've even bought a bat. We've got to do something."

He was right again. We had to keep the team together for the autumn, provided we managed to stay in the league.

**W**e kicked around for a while and I did what I always do, using up all my good saves and dives in the warm-up. It was a perfect day and I couldn't wait to get started. Docs volleyed a long shot in towards the goal which I dived for and pushed past the post. "Nice one, Cat," I heard him say. Sometimes I thought he used the nickname ironically but he was pretty much my best friend so that was OK. I returned the ball to him and then noticed Zsa entering my field of vision. She walked down from the top of the hill, sunlight making her a blurred silhouette, but I could spot her at any distance. She didn't look all that different from any other woman wrapped up warm in a thick coat, furry hat and jeans, but when you know someone as well as I knew her, you know

they're coming even before you've seen them.

She was standing just behind the touch line a few feet from the goal as we kicked off. I took my eye off the game to smile at her. She smiled back but there was something not quite right about it. Like a mask that was slightly crooked. I watched the game. Docs was chasing an attacker into my third of the field. "Played, Docs," I shouted as he dispossessed the attacker with a sliding tackle. I looked round at Zsa. She was clapping. There was a throw which went to Stud and he passed it back to me. I collected with my feet and took the ball to the edge of the area, then picked it up and gave it a good kick up the park.

Zsa was still smiling as I walked back to the goal line. Still smiling or smiling again. These days she was a bit like someone playing a part instead of the real person. She had all the gestures and knew what to say but there was something that left me unconvinced. I don't know what it was that started me off thinking she was seeing someone else. Probably just a stray glance she wasn't expecting me to catch. Or an over-elaborate excuse for turning up late. Something like that.

Soon I was distracted from these morbid thoughts by the game. It had turned into a real contest, with lots of midfield tussles and attacks that generally fizzled out before they reached me. "Docs is having a great game," I said to Zsa.

"Is he?" she replied. "They all look the same to me in those shirts."

"Nice one, Docs," I shouted as he intercepted another cross. "Come on, blues." But Docs lost the ball and as red shirts bore down on my goal he hared after them, eager to make up for his error. There was a tough scramble in which I slid at the feet of two attackers and narrowly missed grabbing the ball. Docs fielded it safely back to me and I hit him on the back, panting for breath. "Great stuff," I said and rolled the ball out to Mike who took it up the wing.

We swapped ends at half time with the score standing at nil-nil, almost unprecedented for us, and we congratulated ourselves. In the team talk we said things like "We've got to push up more and get some good crosses in for Tommo" and "We need to run with it more and hit more first time balls." I pointed out that whenever I took a goalkick the only people moving for it were in red shirts. "You mustn't expect the ball always to come to you," I said. They nodded. I knew it would make no difference but you had to say these things: it was a sort of convention that made us feel like a football team.

Usually immediately after half time you find out one of the teams has raised the pitch of their game as if their oranges had been stuffed with steroids, and when we're playing, it's always the other team. Only this time it was us who picked our game up and took it to the opposition. We fought and pushed forward, we didn't give up when we lost the ball. On the break they got in a couple of decent shots which I stopped easily. We looked like a team who knew what they were doing and I think we all felt that it would bear fruit if we kept it up. We communicated, we passed into space, we started runs from deep positions and with about a quarter of an hour to go we scored.

What can I say? Think of the excitement when Geoff Hurst scored the winning goal at Wembley in



1966. We were euphoric. Never before had we gone ahead from nil-nil. We shouted praise and exhortations to each other not to lose the advantage. I even saw Zsa jumping up and down on the touch line. "Who scored?" she wanted to know.

"Docs," I said. Yes, it was Docs. He'd gone up for a corner and when the ball curled out he slotted it home with great panache.

**T**he pressure was really on me now. There was a danger that we would become complacent, unaccustomed as we were to being a goal ahead. Within minutes they slipped a long ball through our defence and I had to punch a good cross away and concede a corner. They took a short one and their centre forward tried a shot which again I could only deflect, but this time Docs was on hand to tidy up.

About five minutes from time they were crowding round my penalty area looking to get a cross in, keeping possession whenever our defenders tried to take them on. They looked better than they had all game. One of them made a short pass to a tall blond guy who earlier in the game had failed to get on the end of a couple of crosses and suddenly I knew what he was going to do. Out on the edge of the area he had a quick look round. There was no one free of a marker. Even as he swung his leg back to take the shot I imagined the trajectory of the ball, a gentle curve into the top corner of the net, and me lying in a sorry heap in the mud.

He struck the ball and I knew this was my opportunity. The ball could only have been in the air a second, two at the most, but from where I was standing time stretched. This was it. I might never again have the same chance to make my favourite save. I'd been waiting for this as long as I'd been playing football, ever since rainy school afternoons when I ran up and down the wing just dreaming of being in goal.

I longed to leap up towards the top corner of the net and meet the incoming ball with my closed fist inches beneath the crossbar, tipping it over for a corner when every single person on the pitch had expected to see the ball sail into the back of the net. My boots would be at least two feet off the ground, I would be practically flying, making the subtlest, most vital contact with the ball to keep my team in the game. Afterwards they would gather round me clapping me on the back and saying "Blinding save, Cat" and "Great save, keeps." That would be nice and I would enjoy it but it was the save that I had been waiting for, the acrobatic leap into space, the perfect timing and the ball tipped over.

The ball left the blond forward's foot and I leapt. My stomach lurched. I could see my hand stretching to meet the ball and the intersection of post and crossbar growing huge out of the corner of my eye. It was as if I was drawn there, as if it had been written that I would make the save. It was perfect. I felt the contact with the ball and for a final sweet moment the wind on my face, and I knew the ball was safely over the bar.

Then I froze.



Illustrations by Kevin Callan

I suppose I just wasn't expecting it. You've heard about it happening to other people but you don't think it'll ever happen to you. Well, believe me, it just might.

One or two of the players stood open-mouthed but most of them had either seen this happen to other people or they'd heard about it and they just hung around looking a bit pissed off that the game had been interrupted. Hey, well I'm sorry, guys. You know, I didn't mean to do it. It's just something that happens if you want something badly enough and then you get it. Obviously the conditions have got to be just right, or just wrong, depending on how you look at it. There's got to be that fusion of complete satisfaction and ecstasy and I don't know how many different emotions. You can't plan it. You can just hope it never happens to you.

I had frozen solid, to all intents and purposes turned to stone, and yet I remained suspended in the air, my head about 12 inches beneath the bar, my arm outstretched towards the corner of the goal where I had tipped the ball over the top in what had obviously been a perfect save. This wouldn't have happened otherwise. My legs were tucked up beneath my body. I'd seen some of the great goalkeepers do that when making this kind of save and clearly I had managed to match my ideal of what they could do.

Docs approached close enough to touch and tapped his knuckles on my leg. It would have felt harder than his own. Not exactly solid, the sound was more resonant, as if the leg were hollow. As if my body had become a cast of itself. Zsa came round the goalpost and gazed up at me, her eyes huge. Perhaps this was new to her. I hoped not because I needed someone who knew me as well as she did to help me get down in one piece. Or rather two pieces.

I heard some desultory discussion about the game and how it might be concluded. One of their forwards suggested simply playing on for the remaining few minutes, leaving me where I was. "Don't be a dick," said Tommo, for which I was grateful. "What if you take a shot and hit him. You know what'd happen." This subdued the other player and he looked round for the ball, just for something to do. He seemed to be embarrassed by my predicament, as if I had burst out in tears in front of a packed assembly or dropped my trousers in a lift.

It should go without saying that I felt a degree of cool detachment from what was going on beneath me. There was nothing I could do to influence events. I couldn't speak or communicate in any way. I was a statue, a brittle cast of myself as I had been in that single moment of goal saving. I thought I ought to be experiencing some anxiety but in fact I felt quite calm. I was reminded of the time when my car went out of control on the motorway and spun round and round. I had just sat there, aware that there was nothing I could do, everything would just go on with or without me. It could only have spun round for three seconds yet it had seemed like an eternity before it smacked against the crash barrier and I was knocked back to my senses.

The difference now was that the sense of eternity was stronger. My survival was in the hands of 21 men in football shirts – and Zsa.

"Can't we just move him and finish the game?"

asked Stud. "And then carry him back to the changing room or something?"

"It's not that simple." I was pleased to hear Zsa's voice entering the debate. She was standing right underneath me so that I couldn't see her. My field of vision was that of the cast's. "You have to break something off," she continued. I was so glad she knew what to do. I resolved not to think bad things about her in future. If she had wanted me out of the picture it would have been so easy to keep quiet and see if anyone else knew how to get me down. "It has to be something he won't miss, like a bootlace or something."

"Why can't we just pull him down?" someone asked.

"Try," she said. She knew they wouldn't be able to.

However, a number of the biggest men gripped hold of my cast and tugged. There was no give and they backed off, faintly disturbed or perhaps just irritated by the delay.

"The laces aren't free," said Docs. "There's nothing to get a hold on. Can't we just snap his foot off? It's just a cast, after all. It's not really him any more."

I became frightened for the first time.

"Don't!" said Zsa sharply. She knew. She knew. "Don't do anything. There's got to be something we can get at."

Docs spoke again. "Bob. Bob, can you hear me?"

It was the first time someone had talked to me rather than about me. But I couldn't respond.

"I'm sure it's all right to break a bit of anything off," someone else chipped in, one of their players eager to get on with the game. "It's not as if that's him. I saw a thing about it once. You snap something, anything, and that frees the cast. Then you take it to the bloke's flat and leave it there alone for a few days. And he's as right as rain. I've seen it. Don't ask me to explain it but that's what happens."

"Don't come near him," Zsa commanded. Thank you, Zsa. Thank you. You probably saved my life.

"Look, love," the same fellow said. "I don't expect you to understand but we've got a game to finish here. We get him out of the way and finish the game. There's only a couple of minutes to play. Then we'll help you carry him home."

"Hang on." I recognized Brian's voice. "We're without our goalie now. We can't play on without him." This both pleased me and sparked my anxiety.

"Course you fucking can," the other man said. "One of you lot goes in nets. That's what you'd have to do if he was injured or something."

"Shut up! Shut up, all of you!" Zsa shouted. "I've found a fold in his shirt. I can snap it off and he'll be OK, but you've got to take the weight to stop him falling." She's all right, that Zsa, I remember thinking to myself. She's all right. I'm not exaggerating when I say she may well have saved my life back there. She deserved a place in the New Year's Honours just for that.

I couldn't feel anything, of course, but I watched a group of them gather round beneath me and each take a hold. I heard a definite click as she snapped off the fold of my expensive goalkeeper's jersey and suddenly it was as if the TV had been switched on and turned up loud in an empty house. Sensations rushed in through the hole in my jersey and I was buffeted, even though I stayed right where I had been since the

cast formed: tucked away in the gloved right hand. Zsa did well. Not only because she chose to break off a piece of the shirt, but because she chose the shirt in preference to snapping off one of my fingers. It's so often fingers that are sacrificed in these situations. In my case that would have had far-reaching implications. It would have been like tearing a hole in the fuselage of an aircraft flying at 30,000 feet. You know what I mean.

**T**hey lowered the cast and me inside it to the ground. A guy in a red shirt had collected the ball from behind the goal and taken it to the corner flag. He was determined to restart the game. It hurt but in a funny sort of way I wanted the game to continue and for us not to lose, so that it would be worth it. The group who had lowered the cast to the ground were discussing with Zsa what was the best thing to do. Eventually it was decided that they would carry me to her car and Docs would go with Zsa back to my flat. Stud meanwhile was to have collected my stuff from the changing room. But there was pressure from some of the others on Docs to stay and finish the game. So, they carried me down to the car, laid me on the back seat and Zsa sat and waited in the driver's seat while Docs and Stud ran back up the hill and the game was resumed.

I sat there wondering what was going on in Zsa's mind and hoping we wouldn't concede a goal in the dying minutes of the game. Zsa didn't talk to me but I saw her looking at me in the rear-view mirror. Did she know I was able to hear? I don't know. She put a tape on. I didn't know who it was but she'd played it in the car before.

Docs reappeared, flying down the hill, his arms raised in victory. I heard him whoop. "We did it," he grinned at Zsa as she opened the passenger door and he jumped in. He turned and looked at me. "We did it, Bob," he said with a big smile. "We bloody won. We've never won before and we won today. That means we won't go down. And it's thanks to you." It was nice to be addressed directly, and obviously I was delighted about the result but I could see Docs was a bit uneasy about the cast. He seemed to want to touch me to communicate his pleasure and share the victory but didn't know whether to or not. Zsa settled it by starting the engine and swinging out into the road.

It was weird being driven home like that. Not only the whole cast thing, but lying in the back looking at the backs of their heads, looking for all the world like a bloody married couple.

Zsa parked outside the flat, bumping the front tyre against the kerb in a way that would have made me wince. Together they carried me upstairs and laid me down on the grubby landing carpet to unlock the door to my flat. It was the first time I'd entered my own place in such a way. It all looked so different. Like a stage set all got up to represent my flat. The details were all there but they weren't quite put together right.

"What do we do now?" Docs asked.

Zsa had known all the answers up to now. "We put him somewhere he'll be comfortable and leave him."

"Comfortable?" Docs queried, possibly wondering where comfort came into it for a statue.



"Yes. Let's put him on the sofa. That's where he sits when he's at home." She was right again. Nice one, Zsa.

So they left me there and walked out. It upset me a bit that neither of them said anything to me like "See you in a few days" or anything. Something encouraging like that would have been nice. Still, I watched them go and Zsa stuffed the keys back through the letter box after she'd closed the door. She was that sure.

In fact, she had a spare set of keys to my flat but still I had the strong impression she knew I'd be out of there in a few days' time and back playing in goal.

As it happened it only took a day and a half. It's hard to describe those 36 hours. If you've been through this yourself you'll know anyway. So this is for anyone who thinks they might be losing it. What normally happens to you after you get drunk? And I don't mean a few beers and a couple of glasses of wine drunk; I mean a whole bottle of spirits and maybe half a dozen tequila slammers drunk. Like, paralytic. OK, you get the same thing after a heavy evening down the pub but just not as intense. What happens is you fall asleep. You come home, you forget all about drinking loads of cold water to pre-empt the hangover and you collapse into bed. You're out cold before your head hits the pillow.

But imagine if you came home and you didn't fall asleep. You have to deal with this drunkenness while remaining awake. Maybe it's never happened to you but you can imagine it. You're just not tired or you've simply got to stay up for some reason. Whatever. The process of moving from drunk to sober, which usually takes place while you're asleep, happens in full view of your conscious mind. It's not particularly pleasant.

Well, getting out of the cast is something like that. You maintain a high level of self-awareness, constantly asking, is this it, am I OK yet? Some people flip. They can't handle it. But like I said, for me it was relatively quick. One state recedes and the other fades in. You don't do anything; it just happens. But your mind won't shut up, going on and on at you, wanting to be able to get a grip.

There must be a moment when you cross over. When you come out of the cast and find yourself suddenly looking at it thinking, what the hell happened? But it's like when you fall asleep after hours of trying to stay awake to watch the late election result or just because you thought it would be a crazy thing to do. You fall asleep just for a second, you think, and then bang, you're awake and it's four hours later and you've missed it, whatever it was. You feel cheated and stupid.

With me it was as though one minute I was curled up inside the right hand thinking, what's going to happen next, how will I get out? and the next I'm walking out of the kitchen into the living room and there I am lying on the sofa. Only it's not me. I'm me and that's the cast, now completely hollow and lifeless.

I kept it, of course. You don't throw something like that away. What more perfect souvenir could you want of when you were happiest? For half an hour or so I sat there looking at it, all sorts of questions buzzing round my head. But none of them really

needed asking. The important thing was I had made that save, I had been fulfilled, we had won the game. Now I was whole again.

But not quite.

I looked down at the goalkeeper's jersey which I was still wearing. There was a small uneven hole in the material just below the badge with the three lions. In the same place on the cast was a rough edge where Zsa had snapped off a fold in the shirt.

I carried the cast up the stepladders and found a safe place for it in the loft. Whenever I wanted I could come up here and look at it.

I changed out of my football kit and had a shower. It was late afternoon. By the time I got round to Zsa's she would be back from work. I wanted to thank her for what she'd done for me. I drove round but there was no answer. I kept ringing for a while until someone poked a head out of a neighbouring flat to see who was making all the noise. OK, OK, I'm going. I had spare keys to Zsa's flat as well but I didn't know how long I'd have to wait. She could be out for the evening, I thought, and I wanted to see someone, a friend, anyone. I'd had quite enough of my own company.

Docs lived a few miles further out but his flat was nicer than mine or Zsa's. Being further out he could enjoy the luxury of having enough space to spread himself around. As I drove I thought about the game. It didn't matter that I had to call him Docs. He was my friend whatever we called each other. I parked across the street, noticing the light on in his window, and pushed open the street door which was always left open. I'd warned him about the risks but he said it wasn't for the lack of trying to get his neighbours to cooperate. They were just lazy. It was too much trouble to give the door that final push.

I climbed the stairs to Docs' flat and knocked on the door. I knocked again but no one came. The light had been on so I felt sure he was in. Docs didn't leave lights on. I knocked again then bent down and pushed open the letter box. The hallway glimmered. The main room was at the end on the left. I could hear music as well. It was familiar but I couldn't place it. I realized I hadn't been round to Docs' for at least a couple of months. He'd been round to my place and we'd seen each other for the games, but I hadn't made the effort to visit him at home.

Anyway, the fact that he had music playing convinced me he was in but hadn't heard the door. Perhaps he'd had a particularly hard day at work and was having a nap. It crossed my mind that he could have got lucky, but this seemed like an unlikely time to be doing it. I knew what Docs was like after a day at the office. Mr Bad Tempered or what? So I reached in through the letter box and caught hold of the string with his spare key on it. I'd told him about that as well, but he'd said, "When you lose things as easily as I do, that spare key is essential. I've lost count of the number of nights I've come home pissed as a fart and used it because it's easier than searching through me pockets."

I unlocked the door and stepped inside. "Docs," I called gently, but there was no answer. The music was infuriatingly familiar but still unplaceable.

Do you remember I said how you sometimes know someone's there before you see them? Well, it's not



always the case, because I felt nothing like that as I turned out of the hallway and into the main room. The first thing I saw was the CD player with the red repeat light on. As I took in the sight of Docs and Zsa cast in a lasting moment of mutual rapture in the middle of the floor I recognized the music. It was what had been playing on the car stereo when they'd driven me back to my flat, a statue on the back seat oblivious to what was going on.

I said that Docs had plenty of space to spread himself around. He had done just that with himself and Zsa. Their casts littered the floor at the far end of the room under the bay window. There were too many of them to count, like a sea of bodies. Clearly he gave Zsa something I couldn't. Perhaps if she'd said something, given me a chance to understand? But I'm kidding myself. I stared with morbid fascination at all the different casts, at the ecstasy on her face, the evidence of her complete abandonment to sensation. The awful traces of vulnerability on Docs' face which I half pitied and half envied. Yes, I knew how he'd felt and I'd seen that look on Zsa's face before, but I guess it was all in the timing. Or something like that.

Don't ask me how they got out of their casts. I really don't want to think about it too hard. But they found a way. Lovers always do, after all.

But this latest cast was one souvenir they wouldn't get to keep. Feeling numb and empty inside, I went looking for the baseball bat.

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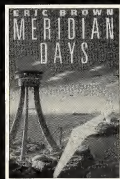
Nicholas Royle is a leading light of the British horror scene, despite the fact that he has, as yet, published no novels. His many short stories have appeared in magazines and anthologies beyond count. His one book to date is the self-published anthology *Darklands* (1991), to which he is planning a follow-up volume. He lives in London.

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# Ansible Link

## David Langford

What's the state of British sf publishing? Literary agents report with a certain bitter humour that we're taking the next logical step after fix-ups, empty sequels, sharecropping works and other non-books: now it's negative books. Macho editors boast not of buying but of cancelling titles. In this era of backoff-list publishing some familiar sf names are prominent... John Jarrold, new man at Legend, has been returning numerous works bought by his predecessor Deborah Beale. "Commissioning editor?" he did not say to our reporter: "More like decommissioning, ho ho." Meanwhile Malcolm Edwards was pruning the Grafton list of "unviabiles" bought by his over-optimistic predecessors Nick Austin and Malcolm Edwards, and presumably hopes by the end of 1992 to be riding out the recession from a strong nil-book, no-authors position.

Some writers thought themselves protected by contracts that bind their publishers to produce the book unless prevented by actual social collapse or nuclear holocaust... but publishers know a trick worth two of that, and have started invoking that obscure and rarely used contract clause which goes, "So sue us."

### A Procession of the Damned

Iain Banks, great white hope of Scots literature, and Iain M. Banks, great white ditto of Scots sf, were both married to Anne Blackburn in March – at that traditional Scots venue the County Court of Honolulu, Hawaii.

John Brunner is a victim of the recession, "thanks to virtually total cessation of support from my US publishers. During the whole of 1992 Del Rey, with 17 of my books, sent me less than \$300 in royalties, having contrived to avoid getting my last novel noticed even by *Publishers' Weekly* and *Kirkus Service*. Now DAW has served notice that all the dozen or so books of mine that were on their list have been withdrawn from sale." Lucrative commissions eagerly sought.

Jim Burns, ace sf artist, has developed a new means of disconcerting authors at signing sessions. "I don't just want an inscription," he insists. "I want you to add some personal stain." (His copy of the *Villains* anthology now contains

something purporting to be the Fractal Bogey of Benoît Mandelbrot. No comment.)

David Langford was alarmed when, after an sf convention speech that cracked a few jokes about Storm Constantine's orgasmic plot devices ("Drop your pants, Luke, and use the Force!"), he was accosted by a leading light of her supporters' club – who looked him severely in the eye and said, "You obviously know nothing about sex and have never experienced an orgasm." Oh.

Brian Stableford is embarrassedly avoiding London's Forbidden Planet bookshop... ever since he attended the "Meet Robert Jordan" event there, with his son Leo and (presented to Leo) a review copy of Jordan's vast *The Eye of the World*. On their way out, a large security guard refused to believe this unconvincing story of review copies, and confiscated the book. As Brian observes, *Forbidden Planet* will make three times their usual profit on this copy (while Jordan and his publisher Orbit get nothing). The shop's policy is thus commercially sound, but lacks something on the PR front.

Gahan Wilson, producer of a festering body of macabre cartoons comparable only to Charles Addams's, was amazed and delighted to receive a Horror Writers of America award for "Life Achievement" at the HWA's Bram Stoker Awards presentation in June. To add to his astonishment, the presentation was announced in time for sf newsletters to report it in May.

### Infinitely Improbable

Ten Years Ago as I write, sf author and editor Maxim Jakubowski said in a *New Musical Express* interview: "This is the first time I ever told anyone: I masturbated to Robert A. Heinlein!" Questioned later by me, he explained that the key image was the bit in *The Puppet Masters* where everyone goes bare-chested to deny concealment to vile, sluglike, alien parasites: all those heaving bosoms, etc. I had to confess that when I first read the book, my teenage attention had been taken up by the alien menace.

Hordes of Novel Awards. The Nebula Award presented by the SF Writers of America (or Science Fiction

and Fantasy Writers of America, as we must now call them, although Frederik Pohl continues to denounce this retrograde step) went to Michael Swanwick's *Stations of the Tide* as best novel of 1991. The Philip K. Dick Award for best original paperback was won by cisatlantic boy Ian McDonald for his *King of Morning*, *Queen of Day*; he also got a European SF Award as best young British author. (That indispensable critical journal *Foundation* picked up another European award as Best Magazine.) The Hugo Award nominations are out as I write and would more than fill this page, so let's wait for the winners; no doubt the great David Pringle will have an editorial word to say about the now traditional shortlisting of *Interzone*. [And the now traditional shortlisting of David Langford - Ed.]

Magicon in Orlando, Florida (September), is the 50th World SF Convention at which the Hugos for 1991 will be presented. A fairish UK attendance is expected: not only is long-revered Irish fan, writer and editor Walt Willis one of the guests of honour, but Glasgow is bidding against Atlanta to hold the 53rd event in 1995 and voting takes place at the convention. By a not very happy coincidence the new British human-rights campaign Death Watch, which urges tourist boycotting of US states practising the death penalty, has taken as its first slogan: "Don't visit Florida – the Sunshine State that kills."

Nexialism. The second (nominally June 1991) issue of Paul Brazier's long-awaited sf magazine *Nexus* appeared this May to sounds of rejoicing. There's some fiction (including Geoff Ryman) but a preponderance of humorous and/or instructive articles about sf. My own was quite topical in June 1991... By now Paul will have announced deadlines for number 3, *The Last Dangerous Nexus*.

Proverbial Philosophy. An English-language Russian magazine published for last year's "Volgacon" turned up recently. The Strugatsky brothers, writing about some now cobwebbed controversy, may have lost slightly in the translation: "There is an old German proverb: 'Every swine can give a plice of ham,' or, speaking Russian, 'take from a black sheer only one flock.'"

# Dreaming Boy

## Stan Nicholls talks to Robert Sheckley

**R**obert Sheckley is a science fiction writer. "I sort of accept the label, but I'm not passionate about it, you know?"

Robert Sheckley is a humorous writer working in the sf genre? "Well, I'm trying to tell certain kinds of stories and often I use humour, yes. But it's hard for me to have an overview because I'm in the middle of it."

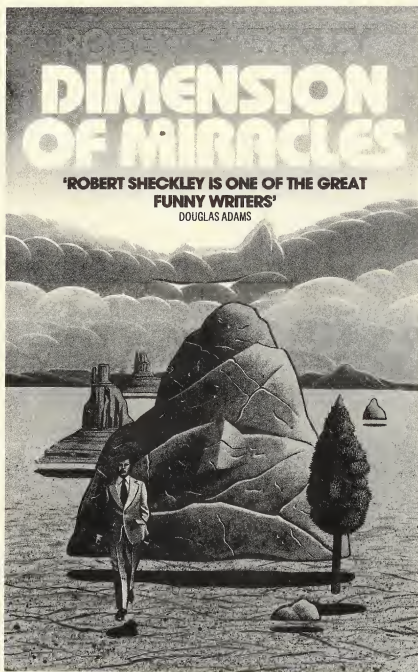
Robert Sheckley is simply a storyteller then? "Yeah, but it's difficult to know what the hell the storytelling urge is. Something drives me to the processor every day and I can't imagine a life in which I didn't do that. I've speculated that even if I lay here paralyzed I'd still find a way of writing. They have things so worked out now that with the motion of your eyes you can type. When I heard that I thought, 'Wonderful! They can't put me out of action.' Isn't that a weird thing to feel?"

So storyteller would seem to cover it. But, in short, how would he describe himself? "In short...?" He laughs. "In short, it's very difficult to talk about exactly what it is I do." Nevertheless we try. And for the purposes of our conversation, Sheckley, one of the all-time great extrapolative humorists and a writer of enormous influence still, is happy to accept the sf tag.

**T**he past, at least, is unambiguous. In the 1950s a stream of inventive, ironic and above all funny stories earned him a reputation as one of the field's leading satirists; "Science fiction's premier gadfly," as Kingsley Amis put it. Many current practitioners of humorous sf and fantasy – Douglas Adams among them – readily acknowledge their debt to him.

That early reputation was based on short stories. But in recent years Sheckley seems to have abandoned them in favour of novels. "Yes, these days I'm much more interested in the long form," he confirms. "I've done very little work over the last decade or so in short fiction. Part of the reason is that you can't make a living out of short stories. There are very few decent markets any more, places where you would want to showcase your work. It seems novels are the only feasible path now for a science-fiction writer."

Although the form may have changed, the themes remain perennial.



The use of an outsider or misfit as a central character for instance. "My heroes are usually misfits of some sort, certainly. Of course it's fair to say that perhaps three quarters of all fiction is

about a misfit of some sort." Would he say there were other recurring themes, if only apparent to him in retrospect? "I've thought about this and, yes, I would. There's the afterlife theme and

the hunter/hunted theme. There's the quest or odyssey motif, which must be the oldest storytelling device, and I've used that a great deal. *Journey of Joanes, Dimension of Mirocles, Mindswop* and a number of others are essentially odysseys. They're all searches for something.

"Another of my obsessions is the mad universe, of course, where all the rules have been changed. That sort of story became possible really because of modern physics. Einstein started a whole science-fiction trend! A lot of sf, or at least the kind I do, wants to set up models for how the universe works. On an almost childish level it's quite fascinating to do that. Because wouldn't it be fun to walk in a world in which anything was possible? Perhaps building a model of a world and running a character through it is at the bottom of my attraction to science fiction."

An attraction which weakened somewhat in the late sixties, when he appeared to break with writing for about seven years. "Yeah, I was sort of blocked up, and I was travelling also: I went over to Europe around 1970, to Spain. I didn't like New York at that time and wanted something else, something fresh and new. Horace Gold had left *Galaxy*, the field was changing, and I didn't feel I was really a natural novelist. I was scrambling around trying to figure out what I could do, thinking, 'Is this all? Am I going to sit in a room and write all my life?' I was writing, but with a much reduced output. Finally the *Omni* job came along and that was a turning point. It helped solve my writing problems. And the problems of writing become the problems of your life anyway."

Acting as *Omni's* fiction editor sorted him out, he says, but editing was never as satisfying as writing. "Nowhere near, nowhere near. When I was there I tried to do a good job, and I think I did, but I was always interested in finding writing chores at *Omni*. I'd write ad copy or any damn thing. I'm a writer, and basically entranced with the sound of my own voice, not the sound of someone else's voice. It sounds terrible to say, but there it is."

"I spent almost two years in that job and one thing I learnt was that I would infinitely rather be a writer than anything else. I was not sufficiently, perhaps, an appreciator of other people's works. My attention has always been on producing my own work. I still have quite a powerful drive to say something. Although I don't know what that something is."

"I do know that the something I'm trying to express isn't exactly a message. In a way, you tell your story quite apart from the plot line, and that underground story you tell is almost an attitude; it's a way of looking at the

world and at your own life. Maybe that's why one gets into science fiction. It's a way of presenting a certain mood, and it attracted me, I guess, because I've often thought of myself as someone who's spent his lifetime as a sort of dreaming boy. I know what it's like to want to walk into a world of wonder. That's always been a passionately strong thing with me."

"But these days I'm seeing a lot of sf which is really thinly-veiled early experiences of the writer. I suppose they are very moving as human documents, but I don't find them especially interesting as fiction. Science fiction gave me a chance to work against the grain, against trends I didn't much like. More and more now I'm being asked, 'Where are you in terms of the popular trend?' As if it would be a good thing to follow some kind of popular path."

"This is a compromise every writer must face. Sometimes, writing a very earnest book about harrowing sexual experiences and growing up on a small farm and all that is coping out on the imaginative experience you might rather tell. But what's popular now is realism. In a way, realism is always chic, but for me it would be a cold intellectual exercise to write a gritty, growing up in God knows where sort of book. I'm not into doing angry young men in space novels. I basically write humour, or what I hope passes for it, which is sort of anti-earnest. You're not thinking, 'I have a universal symbol here and I'm going to run with it.'"

He believes market forces are driving writers harder than ever before. "When I started out the field was wide open because there was no money in it. You weren't part of the market place, one of the movers and shakers. So many writers today want to be part of what's popular. They make a cold-blooded study of what will go well and say, 'I'll write that.'"

If science fiction has become a money-spinner, films have played a large part in that, and Shekley has had several of his stories adapted for the screen. The latest, *Freejack*, was based on his 1958 debut novel *Immortality Inc.* Its hero, hurled into the future following a racing car crash, finds himself in a world where the ageing rich pay to have their personalities transplanted into young, healthy bodies. Escaping this fate, he becomes a fugitive, or "freejack," pursued by bounty hunters.

Directed by Geoff Murphy, and reputedly costing \$30 million, *Freejack* was made without reference to Shekley. "I didn't have anything to do with writing the screenplay. I was not asked. But I didn't mind. I take the position that they've bought a toy they can play with. I've already played with it once."

"*Freejack* was a long-time dream project of the producer/writer, Ron

Shusett, who made *Alien* and *Total Recall*, and he went through a lot of trials on the film. I was in some contact during the ins and outs of it all, and the whole project almost fell through several times. So I would say it's his triumph, really. Or failure. Whatever you want to call it."

What would he call it? "I thought it was a pretty good action film. But I was a little disappointed, to be honest, because I expected them to get into the ideas in my book more deeply. It had very little development of the life-after-death or personality-transfer themes. They felt they had to change the story and set it eighteen years in the future instead of the hundred-odd years I had. They spoke about the problem of doing sets a century ahead, yet I shouldn't think that would be an insuperable problem. Consequently there was a big change in the plot, so that the hero can find his girlfriend, who hasn't changed a hair in nearly twenty years."

"The core of the story is there; a fellow snatched into the future, the spiritual switchboard, the big corporation. It's got the bare bones. But basically it's a guy in a weird world, running. It's got lots of things blowing up and cars piling into cars. But everything does over here."

"The only recent sf movie I've liked a great deal was *Bladerunner*, and I would love to have seen more of a *Bladerunner* look in *Freejack*, and some new ideas. Because a lot of the decor in *Freejack* is very familiar. I don't know if I should be carping at what is my own movie. But I'm not being paid to say good things about it, so what the hell!"

The Tenth Victim, taken from his short story "The Seventh Victim" and filmed in 1965, is probably the best-known movie based on his work. It is generally regarded as a disappointing interpretation of the concept of a future society where legalized murder hunts are a crowd-puller. "That had some lovely stuff but was badly flawed," Shekley agrees.

"It was a little aimless and some of the gags didn't work. I thought it was a good idea. I mean their re-version of it, with the girl hunting the guy and all that. And for such a violent subject they managed to make the deaths almost balletic. It wouldn't be handled like that now, would it?"

"Movie sf is infected with gigantism, which doesn't work very well with wit. But the film audience, in the States anyway, is quite young and they want to see car crashes I guess. I don't mean to put them down, but there seems to be less interest in the well-made smaller film, except maybe in the horror field, where there is some interesting exploration. I'm thinking of people like David Cronenberg. You can make



films like his without spending billions of dollars."

A lot of people thought *The Running Man*, an Arnold Schwarzenegger vehicle from a Stephen King novel, was "inspired" by Sheckley's classic short "The Prize of Peril." Was there any connection? "None, no. I know there was talk about plagiarism. People phoned and asked me about that. I talked with Steve King about it and he said he didn't base it on my story. I believe him. He's such an original writer he doesn't have to steal anybody's ideas."

"Oddly enough, 'Prize of Peril' was plagiarized as a TV show in Germany, and again as a film in France, some years ago. That one vanished rapidly. I haven't seen it, but I heard it was rather political."

"I've done a film script of *Dimension of Miracles* with a friend. We haven't sold it yet but there's been a certain amount of interest. It would be rather expensive to mount, and so would *Mindswap*, of course. I think both would make fine movies. The trouble is once you get these things into films you lose the intellectual content, which is such a huge amount of the interest in science fiction."

Films are butter on the parsnips, if they ever get made; Sheckley's energies are firmly directed toward

novels. Currently he is writing a humorous fantasy trilogy in collaboration with Roger Zelazny. "We're now on the second volume. The main characters are Faust and Faust's double. I'll say that much and not a great deal more. It's quite fun. There'll be a third one, which I suppose I'll start within the year. We begin with a plot outline and expand on it. After we've agreed on the basic idea Roger works out a plot and then I have to make that plot my own. I can only write it as my own book."

"Actually, I miss the dear old days when I could start with a premise, an idea for the first chapter, and run on through. But that was for shorter books. If you're writing a 90,000 word novel you need a lot more planning than for a 55-60,000 word one, which is what my earlier books were."

"I still try to push in order to get wordage out though. It's almost as if a novel has a certain span of time with me in which I can get it written. So I like to work very fast, very intensively, and get a book done in three to four months. In science fiction I don't think that's unusual. All of us have our roots in the pulps - I shouldn't say *all* of us, but a lot of us do - and that taught you to get the story done and the hell with your personal feelings and worries. But you get older, you get a little more long-winded, I suspect."

"I've got three or four projects set up after that. I'm not sure which one I'll go with first. I've got a humorous private detective series which I started some time ago for Tor. I gave them one book and they've been patiently waiting ever since for the second. I'm hoping to have that in their hands very soon. I don't know what the hell I'll write after that. I've got lots of ideas. And a fair amount of anxiety over them, as usual."

I say that I think anxiety is what fuels writing. "I think so too, and it doesn't feel too good. But maybe the alternative is worse."

Robert Sheckley's *Immortality Inc* is published in the UK by Legend (hb, £13.99; pb, £3.99). They have also issued an omnibus of his novels *The Status Civilization* and *Mindswap* (hb, £14.99).

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— John Crompton, *The Sea* (1957)

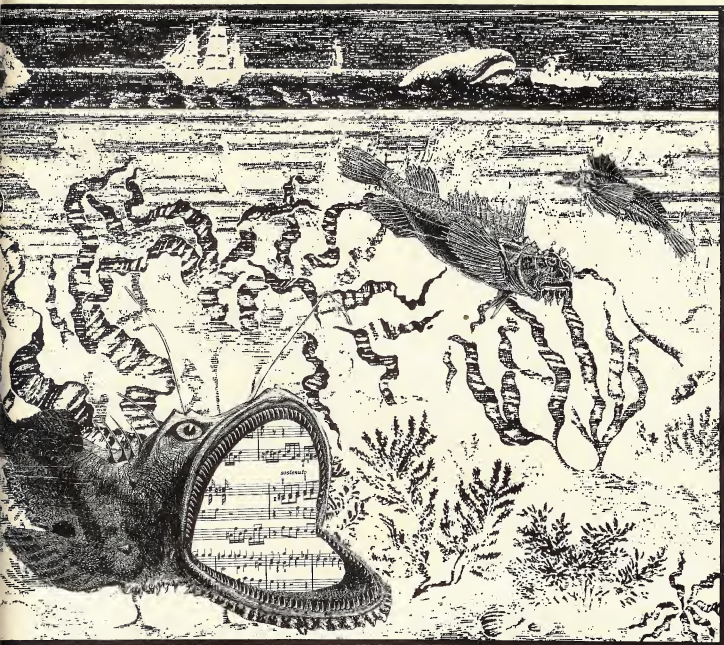
**"H**mmmm. Looks like we're late, Katie. I hope all the good stuff hasn't been taken." Allen frowned at his watch, frowned at her, then started studying the holos. Or maybe it was the legs of the blonde in front of them in line.

Apparently, Allen was going to make her pay for the five extra minutes she'd spent slapping on make-up so she wouldn't look as pasty-white as the grubs that writhed in the holo at her elbow. She'd been on the keyboard for nearly a solid month, trying to finish her fantasia in time for the chamber's upcoming ArtFest, and it showed, just as Allen's petty irritation showed. He never came out and said anything about the time she spent composing, but he always managed to make her pay, somehow. Inviting half a

dozen people over for dinner when she was wrestling with the recalcitrant string section of her computer; refusing to make love with her when she came to bed exuberant over a new passage. Allen was a master at passive aggression. Katie sometimes thought Allen was jealous of her music, her creativity. After all, he worked in advertising, where the same three ideas were passed back and forth like STDs. But he seemed only too happy to spend her grant money on fresh salmon dinners and excursions like this to the ViRoplex. Allen might begrudge her her time at the keyboard, but he wasn't a fool. Being the husband of a successful composer had its perks.

"Have you tried out the mole yet?" a woman said behind her. "You're blind and you've got these paddles for arms. You practically swim through dirt looking for worms; it's wild. I've done it six times and I'm going again tonight if I can get in."

Her companion made sounds of approval. Katie thought of the time she and Allen had tried being moles and shuddered. Sure, you had paddles for arms and slime-covered earthworms tasted like the best



pasta in town, but the razor sharp teeth stuck fast in her memory. Or rather, in her shoulder. Allen had apologized for attacking her afterwards, promising they could stay with gastropods and molluscs from then on if she wanted. But she had told him to forget it. Katie knew he'd only been doing what came naturally – for a mole, that is. At least, she hoped that the vicious behaviour belonged to the ViRo-plex data systems and not to him. Sometimes she wondered exactly who was hosting whom, and whether *all* of Allen's aggression was of the passive type.

"Fleas and fish and barnacles," Allen turned around and sighed. "Did you hear that guy up there? That's all that's left, is fleas and fish and barnacles. I'm not gonna be a damn barnacle, Katie. Clinging to a rock all night. How boring can you get?"

"You don't have to be a barnacle, Allen," she said. "You don't have to be anything if you don't want. We could go home and watch a video." She nudged him with her elbow, trying to loosen him up. "We could go to a motel and register under pseudonyms."

He smiled a little at that, the anger dissipating. And

suddenly there he was – her Allen, the man she'd been charmed by three years ago, when she was convinced she would never create anything again. Not music, certainly not a baby. Allen, whom she'd married quickly, before he could change his mind about her or the child she so badly wanted. Warm, sexy, wry Allen. Who could in a fraction of a second become cold, angry, disapproving Allen. It was a transformation she'd never anticipated, a change that sickened, yet fascinated her. She'd tried to capture the transformation of Allen in her music, but never successfully. Bunched chords strutting up and down the keyboard, accidentals of course, melting into a slow flirting rhythm. A lazy waltz. With an edge. What do you mean you don't want to dance? Oh, never mind, I'm tired. Let's just sit here and listen with my hand inside your blouse like so. I said, like so.

That was close, but not exact. What she wanted to get but couldn't were his eyes. You just couldn't twist notes into anything that spoke of Allen's cold eyes. Or of the green fringe of carrot tops in a garden. Or of the taste of blood. At least she couldn't with the



perceptions she was born with. That's mainly why she'd started coming to the ViRo-plex. As a human, she had certain limits to her thought structures. As a mole, or a clam or a gnat, those limits would expand and contract, warp and shift like pieces of coloured glass inside a kaleidoscope. What she couldn't hear as a human, she might be able to hear as a bird or a bug. Or a rock or a tree or a star; it all depended on what show was in town. And once she could hear it, Katie knew she could write it and play it.

The other reason she came, of course, was because Allen liked it, just as Allen liked any new toy introduced on the market. He couldn't help it; it was the little boy inside dying for a chance to get his hands on the 21st century's version of G-I Joes. A little boy who would pout for days – weeks – if he didn't get his way. Katie wasn't crazy about the tacky promotions for the place – “Does a Bear Shit in the Woods? Find Out For Yourself at the Northwest Animal Virtual Show!” – or the Saturday night crowds of bored suburban professionals it attracted, but, like many, she couldn't afford the home unit. Not yet, anyway.

“God, about time,” Allen muttered as the crowd began to move again. They passed a holo of salmon swimming upstream and she thought of cold mountain water running through her gills, of the tug of a hook and the explosion of eggs from her gut. To spawn, to die. Such simplicity. Such beauty. She'd tried writing a nocturne to capture it, but had had little luck. The notes blotted her manuscript like drops of rain, dissipating as quickly.

“I wouldn't mind trying the fish tonight,” she said to Allen, thinking of resurrecting the unfinished nocturne, perhaps cannibalizing the melody as part of her fantasia, but it was too late. His eyes were on the next holo.

“Now that would be something,” he said, nodding towards a cinnamon-coloured grizzly ripping apart the salmon she'd been only a moment before. “I thought the black bear was good, but a grizzly. Talk about power.”

The muscles in his back tensed and she could sense him already lumbering through the woods in search of slow deer and tree trunks full of honey. In her mind, she heard contra bassoons, tympany.

“What's available tonight?” the man with the leggy blonde ahead of them asked the ticket taker. “Any eagles left? Or grizzlies?”

The ticket guy shook his head. “They both went an hour ago. Let's see here.” He punched a few keys in front of him and shrugged. “We got some barnacle spots open, a few anglerfish, some gastropods – slugs mainly. Couple of starfish. Couple of insects. You into dragonflies? Fleas? Always got lots of fleas open.”

“No, um, real animals?” the blonde asked, her voice shaky.

“You mean mammals?” the ticket guy said.

“Yeah, right,” she said. “Any mammals?”

Katie had seen this before. Some people were nervous about hanging out inside something other than a warm-blooded animal, even if it was just a computer re-creation of it. She figured they were afraid they might pick up bad habits – or maybe a set of antennae. There had been wild stories about people coming away from the ViRo-plexes with beaks and gills ever since the places opened, but those stories were all

nonsense, of course. Rumours started by the same sorts who attributed blindness and insanity to masturbation a hundred years before. The same hidebound sorts who determined the distribution of national art grants now, she reminded herself. Allen might tax her patience – and the limits of their wedding vows – but he was at least good for the checkmark next to the married box on her yearly grant application.

“No ma'am, no mammals,” the ticket taker said, pursing his lips as he regarded the crowd behind her. “So what'll it be?”

There was a whispered conference between the blonde and her husband. She wanted to leave; he was bullying her into going for the slugs. Katie felt like leaning over and telling her to let him have his way – it'd be worth it to see the look on his face after he realized he'd gnawed off his penis, as was the custom after slug sex – but she kept her mouth shut.

She didn't feel like talking much tonight; there was a line of notes in her head, or rather dancing around it. An elusive little flicker of melody that seemed to sing of sunlight through rain or perhaps it was Allen's eyes through her tears, something she'd seen often enough after one of their stupid arguments over his late-night “meetings.” The Devil Beating His Wife was the name of it, she decided, a phrase she'd found while leafing through a musty book of Southern memoirs from the first half of the 1900s. She had a feeling a lot of women knew how it went.

“No grizzlies, huh?” Allen said as the blonde and her husband scooted inside the door, tickets in hand. “How about bats, you got any bats?”

The ticket taker shook his head. “I got fleas, I got slugs, I got barnacles, I got anglerfish. Take your pick, mister.”

“Well, we've been slugs,” Allen said belligerently. “And I'm not gonna be a damned flea.”

“Suit yourself,” the ticket guy said, looking over Allen's shoulder.

“The anglerfish isn't bad,” a voice said behind them. It was the mole-woman's friend. Katie turned and the woman gave her a sly smile, as if they shared a secret, just the two of them. Allen's pants were undone and he didn't know it. She smiled back and the notes in her head rang truer. Did a pleasant little pirouette, then sank back down on their haunches and rocked back and forth slow and easy. A country ballad, lazy as an Alabama creek. Grammy in a chair, pass me my stitching thread, honey. This here's a quilt-picture of your granddaddy. Immortalizing him? Hell no, I'm poking his face with a needle two hundred times a day.

The woman behind her spoke again. “If truth were to tell, I'd have to say the anglerfish is the best thing going here. Why don't you give it a try?”

She was beautiful – black hair with black eyes and a beauty mark the size of a dime near her mouth – which was the only thing that could have accounted for Allen's reaction. Katie knew how he felt about becoming a fish.

“Best thing going, huh?” he said, giving the woman a wide grin. He casually flipped a piece of plastic inside the ticket guy's window – my piece of plastic, thought Katie – and looked back to make sure the black-haired woman was watching. “Okay then, give me two anglerfish. Standard male and female package.



Baby, let's go swimming." The last was directed at Katie, although only peripherally. She looked back at the woman as Allen steered her away from the line and towards the door. The woman winked.

"What in heaven's name is an anglerfish?" her friend's voice carried behind them.

"She-devil," was the answer, a half-whisper that flitted about the notes in Katie's head, tossing them high with a nudge of the nose, a flip of the tail. Then the door swished shut and they were inside.

"The present inhabitants came from above like so many Satans falling from Heaven. Just as the fishes that first invaded land were rejects, so are most of the deep-sea dwellers, for no fish or any other form of life would have left the comfortable well-fed existence in the upper stories for a miserable existence in the basement unless it had to. In their new horrible environment the fishes changed... They assumed new shapes..."

— John Crompton, *The Sea*

The lobby was crowded, as usual, people loitering outside the studios like crows circling a landfill. The ViRo-plex had opened the summer before and had been drawing large crowds ever since. The shows were put together in software suburbs like the one where she and Allen lived, then distributed nation-wide the way movies used to be all the time. Many of the ViRo-plexes were converted theatre complexes, in fact, tucked between the espresso shops and body boutiques at the malls. The admission price was at least four times what a movie cost, but the Plex still boasted the same cheap carpeting, the same cement walls and crude fluorescent lighting. A few more cement walls had been added here and there; the stiff uncomfortable seats had been ripped out and replaced with stiff uncomfortable couches. Ushers in maroon vests took your tickets at the door, showed you to the right studios and helped you hook up to the headsets if you needed it. They even sold popcorn and candy at the snack bar out front or, for a few bucks more, let you rent a Snackjack which would simulate the experience of eating junk food without having to worry about the consequences. This latest innovation had become an instant hit and Katie had heard of three new Foodplexes — VR restaurants exclusively devoted to serving non-existent meals — that had opened in the area just in the past month.

Since VR was a relatively new form of entertainment, most of the ViRo-plex shows were simple recreations enhanced by sensory input culled from implants in lower life forms. My life as a dog and then some. Word had it, though, more complicated shows would be available to the public soon: space travel, simulated death, trips to the hereafter. This last possibility had caused an outcry from the fundamentalists who currently held sway in Congress, the same group who oversaw the distribution of the government art grants Katie had received for the past three years. They had been lobbying hard and fast against the VR heaven and hell, calling it an abomination and more, but since no government money went towards funding its development or distribution, they couldn't do much about it. Yet.

Even so, Katie did not plan on attending any of the more controversial shows when they did hit her

neighbourhood, although Allen had mentioned them several times already. The animal shows were real enough for her; she couldn't imagine any re-creation of heaven that would be anything close to the creative contentment she felt at swimming upstream to spawn or wrapping a fly with silk. More important, there was her future to think about. You never could tell who might casually let drop that she'd been seen attending an incorrect VR show. And who it might get back to. It was a cut-throat world, this world of art. And if you wanted to succeed, you had no choice but to play along. Either that or forego the grants and live on rice, beans and your integrity for the rest of your life.

Once inside, Katie and Allen skipped the popcorn — both the real and simulated — and hurried up the lobby towards the anglerfish room behind a maroon-vested young girl with a flashlight. Katie was excited to get going, full of a needle-like nervous energy she seemed to have picked up from the black-haired woman's laughing eyes.

"Anglerfish," Allen said and snorted. "I sure hope it's more fun than being a salmon. That was a real pain in the ass, trying to climb up that fish ladder. And for what? To dump my load, then kick the bucket. I didn't even get a chance to see what my kids looked like."

"I thought that would appeal to you," Katie said, slowing down to read the screen above a door. Careful now, girl, she warned herself. Careful, here. "I know how you feel about kids." Salamander, the screen read. Climb a tree, have you seen a slug? Lost my tail, grow another.

"Oh, I don't know," Allen said, slipping his arm around her as they moved to the next door. Timber wolf. Cry moon cry. Fresh meat slick. Hey, I'm in charge here. "It might not be that bad having a kid."

Katie looked up at him, trying to read the light in his eyes, impossible as always. Was he teasing her? Was he serious? A low ominous trill rumbled in her head. Minor seconds, deep in the bass, like distant thunder. "You want a baby?" she asked.

Her voice was neutral, no emotion. She could have been the usher. You want a popcorn? You want a Coke? The trill got louder. Diminished chords began to pace up and down the registers, slowly at first, then more and more frantic. Fractured chords with notes like glass. She listened to them and to the sounds of their steps and to the long silence that came out of Allen. A melody curled out of the silence, a sly melody — at once pleasing and fearsome.

The Devil Beating His Wife.

He stopped at a door. Looked down at her and laughed. His eyes were the colour of quicksand.

"Here we go again," he said.

Katie looked at the sign. Anglerfish, it read. And below it in flashing italics, *Warted She-Devil*.

"Follow me, please," the usher said, slipping between them to open the door. Katie hurried in behind her, Allen following.

The room was darkened, as it used to be before the film started. About a dozen people, couples or singles lay on low couches wearing patches over their eyes, plugs on their ears and gloves. Wires connected everything, including the small board next to the couch. They looked like children, fallen asleep listening to old-style Walkmans except for the beards, the wrinkles,

the bald spots and the occasional bulge in the men's pants. Nothing like seeing your partner in a new light to get your interest up again. A white-haired woman in a plaid jacket was just sitting up, the timer beside her couch blinking red.

"These over the eyes, these over the ears, these over the hands. Jack in there," the usher said pointing to the sets, the plugs. She handed them the standard release forms; they signed them and handed them back. Then the usher watched, emotionlessly, as Katie and Allen lay down and jacked in.

Water filled the room and the usher was gone.

Darkness. Cold. Katie floated in the depths of the ocean, hungry. Searching for food in the blackness. A flicker of lights invaded the darkness. Nebraska farmers with lanterns walking to their barns? No, she saw now they were fish. Flashing green, pink, white, colours that she could not name. Distended eyes, flashing headlamps, monstrous jaws. And she was one of them. Hungry and alive, ready to snap, ready to flee. A smaller fish flitted near her, rubbing its scales against her fin. She tasted briny flesh and started to bite it – ahah! food, there – then stopped. There was something about the eyes. Allen?

The smaller fish swam around her as if in awe of her size. She was twice as big as it, easily. She flicked her tail and the little fish was carried away by the current. She turned towards it and worked her over-size jaws. The look in its eyes became something she knew well. Fear. Good.

Katie swam. When the little fish approached, she nudged it, tumbling it away, then swam closer, tickling it with the splayed plume that hung down near her lip. The water was cold and good. The darkness thick with life. Lights everywhere. Something to eat, something to avoid. She fed and swam. Let the little fish approach and suck at her scales. When it bit into her neck, she felt joy.

"Food was short so those that 'lived on each other' could not afford to miss any opportunity and grew enormous mouths and wicked teeth."

– John Crompton, *The Sea*

**T**he next day, after Allen went to work – he was vying for a copywriting contract with the new SquirTaco place at the Foodwheel – Katie looked up anglerfish in the computer. As she tapped keys, calling up menus, sweeping through references, a song swam through her head, a wet song. Soggy chords resonating with tears and seawater, kelp and shrimp and baby shoes.

The melody played over and over, making her think of the water from the night before, remembering Allen's teeth sinking into her flesh and the burst of pain and satisfaction it had given her, remembering the incredible power that she'd felt at the close of his small pincerlike jaws about her scales.

That inexplicable joy had stayed with her long after leaving the virtual couch and the crowded lobby and the parking lot thick with fin-tailed cars. It warmed her, freeing her tongue, making her laugh as she chattered on about inconsequential: the price of cheese, the nose on that man. Allen, on the other hand, had been subdued. He always fared better on land than in the sea. He was pure mammal, down to his soul, his atoms.

"What's the matter with you? Didn't you like it?" Katie had asked as he pulled out of the ViRo-plex parking lot. She'd been transfixed by the beauty of the deep water. The cold seemed to awaken something in her. "I thought it was great. Really vivid."

"It was vivid, all right," he said. "Electrocution is probably vivid, too. Self-immolation. Lightning strike. I'm sure they're all thrillingly vivid." He wouldn't talk the rest of the way home. Pouting again, although he would never admit it. Headache, he would tell her. "I'm just not feeling myself lately. No, there's nothing you can do." Not lovemaking, not massages, not begging, pleading, yelling. She'd tried it all and had learned that ignoring him was the only way to save her sanity.

She didn't mind the quiet of the car; she filled it easily with her melodies, always rich after delving into the mind of another species. Golden notes flowing like water. Sprightly trills like fleeting eels, darting fish. She pursued the melodies as if they were rays and snakes and squirting sea urchins, burrowed deep inside a harmony for the last tasty morsel of a note.

At home, her hunger was more literal. After rooting around in the cupboard, she'd found a tin of sardines and pounced on them, biting off the heads with quick efficient snaps. Allen had watched her from a dark chair, wincing each time her teeth clicked shut.

Katie smiled, thinking of his moody silence. A year ago, it would have devastated her. Her beautiful Allen, unhappy. Possibly even mad at her. Now, she found it childish. And not a little annoying. She brought the file she wanted to the screen and forgot him entirely.

The information on the anglerfish was sketchy, but intriguing. It used the second name – wanted sea-devil – just as the ViRo-plex had last night, but gave no explanation for it whatsoever. It did, however, explain the angler part of its name – a moniker derived from its habit of "fishing" for unsuspecting fingerlings with a cord of flesh that extended from its head to below its lip, a dancing snake of mutated dorsal fin. Although usually found at 6,000 feet, anglerfish were occasionally pulled out of the upper reaches of the Northwest waters by a fisherman's net. One such fish had been found by a shrimp fisherman in Oregon eleven years before the turn of the century. A female, twelve inches long. Along with a two-inch male, permanently attached by his mouth to her head.

Katie read the rest of the information quickly, then stayed at the computer terminal for a long time afterward. An idea teased at her, tantalized just outside her perception, like a bit of bobbing flesh dancing before a mesmerized fingerling.

"Life in this underworld must be rather like the night life in the slums of certain cities in the old days: single assassins carrying knives prowling in the dark. Similarly the assassins in the sea basement prowl around, but for the most part they must prowl to no effect and grow hungry. So when they do find a victim it may have to last them a long time."

– John Crompton, *The Sea*

**A**llen came home from his meeting in the afternoon; Katie was busy at the composing keyboard and didn't notice what time it was when he came in to kiss her – and to interrupt a crucial

passage. Allen had decided to make up, apparently, and just in time to chase a bit of inspiration out of her head, as was his style. Allen was rarely overtly hostile, in fact, his interruptions were usually very friendly, which made her feel all the more frustrated. "I just missed you and thought you'd like a little snack," he'd say, setting a plate of grapes and cheese down on top of her power switch, wiping out an afternoon's work. "Oh no, did I do that?" No, Allen never meant to do any harm. His intentions were always the best, the most noble. Unless, of course, she crossed him.

"I'll be done in a few minutes," she called when his knocking around in the kitchen became too hard to ignore. Any louder and it would start to show up on her recordings. She'd used samples before, but wasn't interested in Allen's petulant offerings. "I've just got to enter in a few more woodwinds."

She flipped switches on her keyboard – oboe, clarinet, flute, and yes, more violin – distilling the sound she needed, overlapping them onto the four, five, six? tracks of sound she'd added this afternoon, creating the resonance of a full orchestra here, creating a totally new sound there. Piano notes that you blew like a flute. Trumpet blasts that beat from a drum. Katie layered the music together the way the encyclopedias she'd read as a child layered the cellophane diagrams of bones and muscle tissue and blood vessels together until there stood a man.

The fantasia was going to be a success, she thought, playing back her day's work, noticing a missed note here, a weak passage there. But would it be good enough to secure another grant? Would her music alone be enough any more, especially when the competition was growing tighter and tighter? The grants seemed to be going to the most stable and sanctimonious of applicants: a pious sculptor with five home-educated children, a Church of Christ painter who'd been married to the same man for fifty-one years.

She entered a few notations on the keypad, scribbled some notes to herself on the sheet of hard copy she always kept in front of her when composing, and closed down. The piece might be a commercial success, but artistically it was empty, she knew. The melody she wanted to infuse into it had slipped away from her, like the fingerlings had the night before 6,000 feet below sea level. Sometimes, she wondered if the *real* reason she wanted a child was to convince herself that she could, indeed, create something of worth and beauty, if not with her music then with her genes.

Or was there another reason, a voice whispered inside her. A far more self-serving reason.

She quieted the voice, thinking of a child. Her child. She would be tiny, delicate as a Chopin waltz. Pattering of feet on hardwood, coo and clatter. Laughter and milk. Small hands tugging at her pencils. Lullabies in pink flannel. That would be her child. Except. Except. Allen. Allen was balking now at the idea of her conceiving despite his murmured assurances before their marriage vows. Allen had, in fact, told her months earlier that he had no intention of fathering a child, a circumstance neatly guaranteed by the semen-deadening chemstick embedded in his left bicep.

Katie had grown to despise the stick in his arm –



and at times, to despise Allen for its existence. It bulged slightly under the smooth skin – a mocking reminder of lust-hardened genitals, of a belly full with child. She often stroked it at night after he'd fallen asleep, wondering just when its effect would wear off; Allen would never say. At times – mainly when she woke from dreams to find herself cradling only her sweaty bedclothes – she would squeeze the lump gently between thumb and forefinger, pondering the consequences of popping the hard knot of chemicals from his arm like pus from a pimple.

"A certain species, of the angler-fish tribe, judging by all the specimens secured, possessed only females. No males were ever found, even when such ought to have been hanging around. It was rather a mystery. Where was the husband of this female who regularly produced her fully fertilized eggs?"

– John Crompton, *The Sea*

"I've got an idea," she said, coming out of her studio. It was the first one she'd had in three days, ever since Allen had been edged out of the SquirTaco account for a competitor and had decided to "make himself useful" by building her a new worktable. "Why don't we go down to the ViRo-plex and see if there are any grizzlies open?"

Allen shrugged, his eyes on the planer he was using to level the table's legs. He was playing with her again, waiting for her to come to him, to coddle him, to beg and plead and cajole him, to tell him that he was the only one that mattered, that what she did was secondary, unimportant. She stood at the threshold of her studio watching him guide the instrument across the slivered wood, scattering dust onto the kitchen floor where it would settle and stay until she cleaned it up. Just as the dishes on the counter, the dustballs on the floor, the pubic hair and urine that rimed the toilet bowl would all stay until she cleaned them all up.

She'd tried to endure his pounding and knocking and sawing, but had only gotten a headache for her trouble. Some time at the ViRo-plex might give her the inspiration she needed, as well as sooth Allen's rumpled ego. It was the best she could do. It was *all* she would do.

Allen seemed to sense that. "I don't know," he said, picking up the electric saw. "I don't want to keep you from your work. I know how important it is to you." He turned on the saw and touched the wood, a harsh shrieking piercing Katie's patience, just as it had pierced her concentration all afternoon. Just as Allen had intended.

He turned the saw off and set it onto the linoleum floor, next to the leather work gloves he'd picked up at the hardware store the day before. On her account, of course. She held her breath, counting. When she looked at him again, he was grinning at her, nodding towards the floor. In the sawdust, there was a message. K + A.

She smiled at him, even though her mouth hurt. She didn't love Allen any more; it was that simple. She didn't even like him. The knowledge filled her head like the smell from the sawdust. Somewhat pleasant, somewhat irritating.

"Come on," she said again, trying to keep the annoyance out of her voice. "I could use a break from the keyboard." And from you, Allen. And from you.

She didn't think she hated him, although it didn't seem far off. Her composing had suffered with him wandering around from room to room, busily hyping his home improvement projects to her, to his friends on the phone. And she was fast approaching the deadline the chamber had set for her contribution to the ArtFest. A missed deadline now would mark her as unreliable. A blot on her record, to be passed along to the national arts commission. She couldn't afford that. Not when there were so many other hungry artists out there. Allen was slitting his own throat, but Allen was too self-absorbed to see that. It was more important that she be made to suffer.

In a way, it was ironic. She had asked him for a child and he had given her himself instead, but she was in no mood for irony. She needed notes, melodies, rhythms and variations. She needed to write music before she went mad.

"So, what about the ViRo-plex?" Her tone came out sharper than she intended.

Allen looked up, his beautiful eyes narrowing. "Yeah, sure. Why not," he said after a minute. "I could use a change of scenery." He might have smiled, a self-satisfied smile since this was what he'd wanted all along, but Katie had already left the room to get her purse.

She paused at the bathroom mirror only a moment, but it was long enough to notice the lines that furrowed her brow, recessed her eyes. She was starting to look old, too old to attract another man. Not that she wanted to leave Allen and remarry; you could lose your grant for a divorce just as easily as for a homosexual encounter. There was nothing down on paper that said you couldn't live your life as you chose, of course; that would be trampling all over the Bill of Rights. But everyone knew that traditional family values were smiled upon by the commission. And generously rewarded. She had known that when she married Allen. She wondered if that was the real reason why she had married Allen. It was a moot point now. She didn't love him any more, but she knew she couldn't afford to leave him, either.

Since it was a weeknight, the ViRo-plex was nearly empty. No crowds, no nervous blondes, no exuberant mole-women. Katie looked for the black-haired woman who had recommended the anglerfish, but didn't see her. Even the regular ticket-taker was different, replaced by a ginger-haired woman who surrendered two tickets for the grizzly room wordlessly.

The two of them went inside and settled onto the couches, signing away any responsibility on the part of the ViRo-plex for their lives. Satisfied, the usher plugged them in, then disappeared. Along with the half dozen others in the room, Katie became a bear.

Lumbering through the woods, she tried to call up the music that had always been a part of the experience, but had little success. For a moment the warning buzz of bees vibrated into a steady ramble up and down the bass, winding and convoluted as her feelings towards Allen had been the past few months; but then it was gone, fleeting as the sting of a bee through her heavy hide. She chased after the melody, splashing through water, digging among clover, but it refused to return. Resigned, she ate grubs and watched Allen through slitted eyes.

He seemed content as a bear, rooting through the



dirt for a shivering marmot or rotting mountain lily bulb with equal glee. Katie watched him fell an elk with a swipe of his paw, nearly topple a pine scratching his back. Inevitably, he turned to her and she felt cold as he approached her, his eyes small and murderous. He nuzzled at her, nudged her and she pulled away, only to be swatted with a meaty paw. She backed up and he came forward, sniffing, exploring. He wanted her, the look in his eyes said, wanted *all* of her, not only her vagina, but her music, her soul. Everything. She whimpered as he entered her, as he bit her neck, growled low in her ear. She closed her eyes, trying to ignore his grunting, his grabbing, but she couldn't. He was eating the melodies in her mind, eating them as surely as he would eat her cubs had she had them.

When their timers cut the connection and Katie found herself back on the hard couch surrounded by curtain-covered cement walls, Allen seemed in better spirits, talking animatedly of an idea for a new advertising campaign while they strolled past the virtual rooms. As they passed the anglerfish room, Katie hesitated, thinking back to the melodies that had filled her mind after leaving the studio.

"Allen, I want to do this one again," she said and he laughed, snaking his arm around her.

"Cold fish," he said and bit her ear. She thought of his tiny mouth biting through her scales and shuddered. Absently, she rubbed at a patch of skin near her mouth. It felt dry. Scaly.

"Come on," she said. "I need it. For my music. Let's do it again. Please?"

"What now? Two in one night?" He looked at his watch, yawned. Feigned thought. Theatrics, always theatrics with Allen.

"I was hoping we could get to bed early," he said.

"I wanted to get up and go make the rounds. I talked with some people today about picking up some freelance work. You want me to be a contributing partner, don't you? I know I've been driving you nuts hanging around the house. I'm only happy when I'm working, Katie. Just like you. You want me to be happy, don't you?"

"Yes," Katie said, touching the door. "I want that." She could almost feel the water through the grain of the wood. Cool, black, brackish. A string of notes bubbled up from her subconscious, broke through. Allen's eyes through tears, no, rain, no, water. His mocking smile as he mounted her, still smelling of someone else's musk.

The Devil Beating His Wife.

"Well, I would think you'd understand that I need to get out there and pound the pavement then. I mean, you're the one who's always talking about having kids, raising a family. You know how much money that takes."

She pressed her face against the wood, hoping to hear the music again, to feel the water flow through her gills again, to smother her senses with nothing but cold. To block out Allen and his convenient lies, his machinations. He would never give her a child – not as long as the chemstick was in his arm, and he had no intention of having it removed – and she couldn't have a child by anyone else and still keep getting the grants. There was too much risk, too much competition from other artists who would be only too



happy to pass along a waggle of gossip to the chamber and eventually, the national arts commission. Allen himself might even do that to her. He seemed to hate her music that much. Katie knew she was trapped. She needed her music, but to create it she needed the money. And that meant playing by their rules. She yearned for a better life, a life amid the deep, the cold. The water. A person could get lost in water that deep for a long time. Perhaps forever. The black-haired woman had been right. There was nothing better than the bite of the cold.

"I'd really like to do the anglerfish again," she said. "It's important to me, Allen. Very important. I need to hear the song again, to find it again."

"Sure, sure, baby, we'll do it again. I promise," Allen said, but his mind was already on the woman ahead of them, hurrying towards the exit door. "Maybe this weekend." He chuckled. "Hey, nobody else will want to."

"The truth, when it came to light, was indeed surprising. The male, when very young and very small, bites the skin of the female, and holds on. He holds on so tenaciously that in time he becomes embedded in her flesh and his skin grows over the aperture and imprisons him. He is now a part of her and gradually becomes even more so. Her veins merge into his. His heart and digestive system decay away..."

— John Crompton, *The Sea*

**T**hey didn't go, of course. Allen had plans — business plans, he called them, with a sharkish grin.

"Charlie farms out contracts all the time," he told her. "He likes my ideas, but I've got to jolly him along, you know how it works. Buy him a few drinks, a few laughs. Come on, Katie, don't be a stick. You know how it is in my line of work."

She did know, even though Allen had no concept how it was in her line of work; he never listened to her music any more, never came to the performances. And at this point, her line of work was seriously behind schedule, as the chamber's executive secretary informed her when he called Saturday morning.

"If completion of this fantasia is proving too taxing to your creativity, Katherine, the chamber would be more than happy to suggest a collaborator," he'd told her, his tone cool as kelp. Katie knew there were probably hundreds of willing collaborators standing in the wings, waiting for her to fall. But she would disappoint them.

She assured the executive secretary her contribution was nearly completed — tasting the lie on her lips as she did — and gladly accepted the advance on her quarterly stipend that he offered as a show of good faith. And more precisely as guilt money. It wasn't a lot of money, compared to what she would receive when the fantasia was complete, but it was enough for the both of them to live on for several months in relative comfort, even if Allen didn't return to work. It was more than enough to last until the new round of grants were awarded, which the secretary hinted she would be receiving — provided the fantasia was all that she had promised. It was also enough to buy a home ViRo unit.

Katie chose the latter.

Allen, when he returned home the next day, was delighted.

"God, you even got a program for grizzlies," he said, flipping through the selections. "Salmon, otter, eel, duck..." You kind of went overboard on the sealife, didn't you? Why didn't you get anything new? You know I want to try out the off-planet stuff they're selling now. A little variety now and then is not gonna kill you, Katie."

Katie gave him a flat smile, watching as he read through the operating instructions. She had already read through them, as well as all the available fine screens, some legal, some not — many times herself. She'd found it nearly as satisfying as composing. They had a certain beauty, a sinuous electronic melody that she had begun to sing softly to herself. Eels, they were, slipping through the charged black water. She would slip with them. Sting and slither, cut through the dark. Light there. Catch and squeeze and the light.

"What made you decide to get this?" Allen asked. He was bent over the unit, one hand caressing it, his back to her.

"I thought it might shake loose some ideas," she said. "For both of us." She thought of her fantasia, floating within the memory of her composing computer like a perpetual foetus. A foetus that would destroy her if she couldn't give birth to it, just as breech births had destroyed women years before.

Allen nodded, flicking switches. "Yeah, good thinking. I've been feeling pretty stale lately. Guess you have, too. I noticed you haven't been in your studio the past couple of days."

"No, not much," she said, looking over Allen's shoulder. The water was there, inside that unit. The water that held the notes, the melodies, the music that she needed. And what else? A new life for her? She'd thought of little else since bringing the ViRo unit home.

"Looks like it's all hooked up," Allen said, plugging the phones snug over his ears. "They come out and install all this when I was in town?"

Katie shook her head, feeling numb. Did you feel numb during childbirth, or did you feel pain? Should she feel pain now? She didn't know.

"I did it," she said, watching him. He had the grizzly program already plugged in, as she knew he would. As much as Allen revered the creature, he wasn't much like it. Grizzlies were wild, unpredictable. Allen was neither. Allen was cruel, though. The kind of hard-eyed cruelty that liked to destroy beauty because it was there, just as he wanted to destroy her music because it was there. Because it got in his way. Because she loved it, because he could.

"Come on," he said, handing her a headset. "Let's test it out." He hadn't showered yet from his night out; she could still smell the tequila on him, the stale perfume as well. Allen loved his toys, but Katie could no longer afford to provide them for him. She had to think of herself now, her own survival.

She shook her head. "You go ahead," she said. "I want to try to work on the keyboard for a while."

"Now I know why you got this thing," Allen grinned, the pads over his eyes blocking out her guilty pause. "You want to keep me out of the way while you go in there and write your songs."

"My songs," she said and sighed, thinking about the number of times she'd told him they were not songs, they were never songs. "You've never liked

my music, have you Allen?"

He grinned at her, like a little kid playing pirate with two eyepatches. "Hey, they pay the rent," he said. "I'm not complaining. Even if they do sound like the stuff they play on the light rail."

"Yes, they pay the rent," Katie said. And they would keep on paying it for as long as she played the game. Artist. Wife. Mother. She could be it all; she wanted to be it all. Didn't she? She had no choices any more. It was the only way. "They also keep me sane. I need to write music, Allen. I need to create. It's the only thing that matters to me. You know that, don't you? The only thing."

"Sure, babe. I know that," he said. He lay back on the couch. "And you know what matters to me. And what doesn't. Timer all set?"

"Everything's ready for you," she said and watched him jack in. His face relaxed beneath the eye pads; his body seemed to sink into the cushions..

His face shifted slightly and Katie found herself looking at a younger Allen, the Allen she'd met three years ago after a concert at the Lake District amphitheatre. He told her he loved her music then, among other things. She wondered if he'd been lying then, wearing the mask of an enraptured admirer, or if he had somehow metamorphosed into the person he was now, the way tropical fish had metamorphosed into other creatures that swam the cold murky depths 6,000 feet below. And what kind of creature had she changed into herself? And what might she yet become? She shivered, but felt happy.

Katie watched him for a few minutes, then went into her studio and began to work on the fantasia. The house was quiet and the sound of cars and children playing in the street became muted as if they'd had to travel through dirt or water. Soon, even those sounds diminished to nothing; the house became the tiny cottage in the bottom of a goldfish bowl and she the fish flitting about the cool water, music bubbling out of her like air. She took a simple melody, inverted it, spread the notes into chords, arpeggios, transposed them to another key, found their soul. Played them, played with them. A deeper melody began to rise out of the ripple of notes. Sly and hesitant, pleasing and fearsome at the same time. A song of water and pain, beauty and deception. The Devil Beating His Wife? Perhaps she'd been hasty with that title. After all, there were many types of devils. Some with wives and some with husbands.

She danced it along the keyboard in a strutting polonaise; took it in her arms and waltzed with it across the ballroom floor; she pared it down to its bones, tiny and delicate, fishbones, yes, and rocked it to sleep in a lullaby.

She captured a part of it, scrawled the notes onto her manuscript, stored the section onto the computer's memory to work with later. To stroke, to coddle, to feed, like a child. Her child. She knew the fantasia would be complete soon. And after that, another. When she looked at her watch, three hours had passed.

Walking out to the living room, Katie looked down at Allen, still lying on the couch. He was at rest, his face unlined by greed, envy, lust for the blonde woman's legs. It had been such a simple matter to

relabel the programs, switching his grizzly with her anglerfish. Dismantling the unit's automatic alarm mechanism had proved more difficult, but with enough money in the right accounts you could access any information that you needed.

She thought of Allen swimming through the cold depths searching for a female to latch onto; was he flitting through the water now searching for her? She would join him soon enough. Katie loosened his belt, unzipped his pants and began to stroke him, slowly, deliberately. As she'd hoped, he quickly responded. She reached inside his shorts and cupped his testicles, they grew hard and tight in her hand. Ready to give her what she wanted.

She pulled her hand away and went out to the kitchen to find some dinner — a can of tuna fish, a slice of walnut bread. Allen would be getting hungry soon, she thought, regarding the knife as it sliced through the bread. Allen would be getting hungry and she would have to do something about that.

She lined up the blade of the can opener with the rim of the tuna fish can, then pushed, clear juice squirring out onto her fingers. It wouldn't be too hard to find a vein through which to give him the nourishment he'd need, she thought, twisting the handle until the top of the can was severed; she could learn to administer an IV, just as she would learn to clean up his waste.

She thought about the chemstick embedded in his left arm and smiled, using the tip of her knife to work a piece of walnut loose from the bread. No, it wouldn't be hard to take care of her husband, perhaps no harder than assuring a means to fertilize her eggs. She was an anglerfish now, a she-devil, a dweller of the deep.

And in the deep, you did what you had to do to survive.

"In his almost empty body [the male's] testes enlarge and develop like some cancerous growth until his whole inside is crammed. To all intents and purposes he is now merely a bag of sperm, and the female can be said to contain both ovaries and testicles. For she can draw on his sperm as she desires whenever she lays her eggs."

— John Crompton, *The Sea*

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**Diane Mapes** is one of the very best of the newer American sf-and-fantasy authors. Her most recent story for us was "Nesting" (issue 59). She lives in Washington State.

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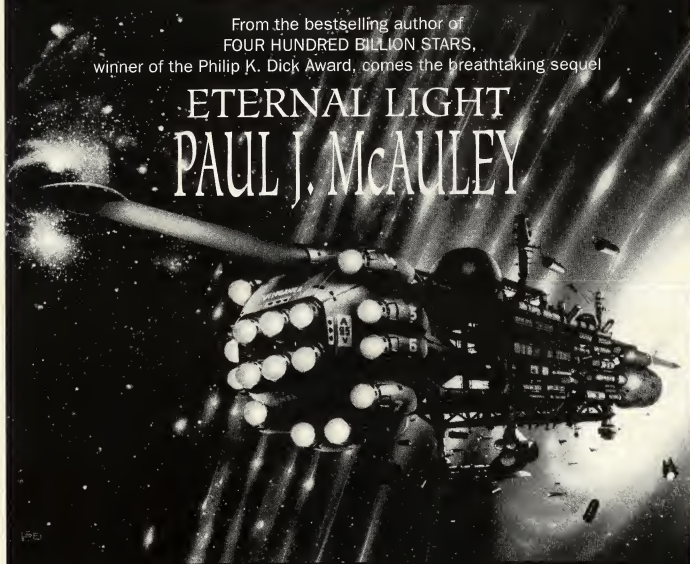
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Like the Queen, Arthur C. Clarke celebrates his official birthday this year at a season when the sun is high. (I write, in June, of an event which will be history by the time *Interzone* 63 appears.) At some point during the week of 18-26 July 1992, in Minehead, where he was born 16 December 1917, Arthur C. Clarke will be proclaimed 75 years old. There will be celebrations, talks, the presentation of the sixth Arthur C. Clarke Award, and the man. Among some of the celebrants there will surely be a conscious and elegiac feeling that he is the last remaining sf writer who can still speak to us with authority from the time of origins, in a voice still present to the world. This feeling may not be quite fair – L. Sprague de Camp and Lloyd C. Eshbach and Frederik Pohl and Jack Williamson (see below) are still publishing writers, and continue to represent to us the fact that genre sf, like rock music, has not yet outstretched the human span – but Clarke has been for half a century a more domineering figure than any of these men (there are no women), and (unlike them) has taken the formulas of sf to express, however falteringly, agendas for the world. In his person he represents the unbroken gaze of that capacity for agenda.

He also blurbs books. It is to be assumed that he does so with the care that comes from responsibility. When he says of Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars* (HarperCollins, £14.99) that it is "The best novel on the colonization of Mars that has ever been written," there is a sense that he has picked his words; that he has spoken in full knowledge that we know he has spent half a century reading (and writing) books about Mars; and that, by eschewing the unspecific (and therefore unfalsifiable) pattern-book hype that characterizes most blurbs written by authors to pay debts and to create debtors, he has laid something of the meaning of his own genuine name on the line. So we open the book with a sense that we are opening a new page in the gaze of sf. We are not disappointed. *Red Mars* is the best novel on the colonization of Mars that has ever been written.

It may be possible to drop the qualification. *Red Mars* may simply be the best novel that has ever been written about Mars. Mars as a venue for the telling of tales. Mars as an agenda for humans. In *Red Mars*, our only genuine neighbour planet joins the human race. (If there were any life on Mars, this would be a mixed blessing for Mars. But there is none.) None of the Mars tales due to be published over the next few years (there are a number of them in the works) will find it easy to alter in any significant aspect this astonishing transformation of the extraordinary amount of data now

available on Mars into a family portrait of the planet. The Mars of *Red Mars* is the home of a family romance – the intimate, sometimes shaming story of the species beginning to breed out. So it is an important book not only through the quality of its telling, which is dark-hued, assimilative, urgent, encompassing; it is important because – sanely, calmly, and without any of the inflamed scapegoat-seeking partisanship of the American hard-sf ideologues – it gathers the planet Mars into human history.

In an essay about sf published in 1987 in *Foundation*, Robinson said that "In every sf narrative, there is an explicit or implicit fictional history that connects the period depicted to our present moment, or to some moment of our past." For most sf writers actively at work in 1992, that sense of fictional history tends to be controlled by an assumption that any continuity between now and the imagined period of the telling will be violated by some variety of terminal holocaust. Almost every sf novel set in the future is now set subsequent to some disaster which ends life on Earth, or sufficiently transforms human destiny so that the escalator of history stops short on the day, and a new clean-slate escalator – nicely purged of the irremediable weight of the done – lifts off for the stars. Modern post-holocaust sf (a tautology for modern sf) may pretend to a sense of history, but in truth it has given up (as have its readers given up) history in despair. In our hearts, most of us in 1992 – writers and readers alike – read sf in the secret conviction that the genre is a body of fairytales about the afterlife. *Red Mars* cannot be so read. It is a tale comprehensively obedient to its author's definition of sf as a genre which continues telling the story of you and me (and the starving children created by the Lords Foul in Rio) as we tremble in our cul-de-sac at the bottom of the scree and the earth begins to shake. It is a consecutive book.

The action takes place halfway through the next century, in a venue which follows on from the world in which we live, though in order to tell a tale at all Robinson does somewhat postpone the various coumpeances which the Fools of the world fluttered

their hankies at just now, antic. So it may stretch plausibility a mite to assume that the avalanches we wait beneath in 1992 will, 70 years on, still be poised above our heads; but this is really an argument about the speed of the escalator: the course of history between now and 2050, as referred to within this novel, has a daylight consecutiveness: there is no mystification, no soothing holocaust to change the rules, no magical enablement to (1) soothe us as we read but (2) ensure our lassitude, because the gap between now and the dream is too great to bridge in life. (It is a Richard Condon thought: but one does rather wonder whether or not 90% of post-holocaust sf may just have been commissioned by the owners of the world, through their editorial hired hands, to keep the rest of us properly quiescent while they prepare the arcologies in which, next century, they will surely dwell.) The colonization of Mars in *Red Mars* is no figment of the world beyond the veil. Mars is an utterance in the present tense of the world.

There is a plot, and action, and characters, and a violent swing of story through climax into denouement, with energies just beginning to recharge before a slingshot ending brings us to the next volume of the intended trilogy (*Green Mars* – no direct connection to "Green Mars," a 1985 novella published later as a *Tor Double* – and *Blue Mars* are forthcoming). From a complex storyline, through which several viewpoint characters intersect and grow and shift and age, a history of the extension of the dense human story to Mars can be extracted. The first landing is in 2020. Over the next few years, robot ships drop supplies and equipment. In 2027, a ship brings the first 100 men and women to the planet. They become the First Hundred. They begin to establish habitats, and (after considerable conflict) opt for rapid terraforming of Mars. Very soon, more colonists arrive, and along with them a gradual (and complexly conceived) shift of power from the United Nations to the "transnational" corporations which have been financing much of the action.

There are set pieces, like the dropping of an elevator cable from synchronous

# Mars Joins the Human Race

## John Clute

orbit to the high rim of a vast caldera. By the time a million people have arrived, social and political tensions have become too multifaceted for any one person to understand or hope to control; after a revised Mars-Earth treaty proves vulnerable to corporate manipulation, a naive but convulsive revolution takes place. Devastation ensues, Yugoslavias galore. But the human hold on the planet is too tenacious and many-handed to expunge. (There is as much dry land on Mars as there is on Earth.) As the novel ends, it is clear that humanity has become indigenous.

The actual texture of the book has little of this simplicity. After a short first section set in 2053, during which the climax of the tale is adumbrated, we return to the ship carrying The Hundred on the initial voyage of colonization, in order to become familiar with the several figures of the group who turn out to be viewpoint characters in Red Mars (and almost certainly its sequels). The three central protagonists — John Boone, Frank Chalmers and Maya Toitovna — seem initially straightforward, but by the end of 500 extremely dense pages all of them (but Chalmers in particular) have become as multifaceted as Mars itself, as humans in the real world: for that is what Mars soon proves to be: a world too real to come to life through the eyes of pulp heroes. Like adult humans in any real world, the three grow masks as they age, palimpsests over the quarrelsome cohorts of magna within, and become more adept at being themselves *pari passu* with the blossoming of history around them (the longest section of the book is called "Falling into History"). By the end of the tale we recognize their angle of entry into any scene, their smell, their fatedness to continue being who they are. We see that we could be them, we could be there. They might have been created initially by Robinson to provide multiple perspectives on his central vision of a real Mars, but in the end they themselves turn out to be Mars: we believe in the agenda that is never spoken but must lie beneath every word of Red Mars because we believe in these people as deeply as it is possible to believe in marks on paper: for in that sense (alone) Red Mars is a mimetic novel, not sf at all. It is a novel of humans at play in the fields of the lord.

The unspoken agenda, which drives Red Mars to 500 pages of urging, is not simply to describe Mars as part of history, but to suggest that unless Mars becomes part of history the human race will not survive. (And we might as well go back to our VR tales of life beyond death, till the rats chew the plugs out.) From this, all subtends. The intense realism of the geography (or, more properly, areography). The placedness of the characters. The refusal (except

for one death towards the end, which is predictable on genre-plotting grounds, and duly happens) to play sf games with the venue, while at the same time incorporating, suitably transformed, as many sf ideas about the solar system as can fit — sometimes with a sense of cramming, with a sense that 500 pages were too short — into the one volume. The anti-capitalist fervour that inspires the more intense moments of direct argument about how to avoid the parasitism of the old system, which to continue profiting from "the gifts of human work" must create interminable needs (in a terminable world). And the emphasis, time and again, on the thinness of Mars (Robinson calls it *haecceity*: but that is a word this reviewer once promised never to use again: and won't). At the intellectual and narrative climax of the book, John Boone gives a speech on the slope of Olympus Mons. An asteroid has just been successfully directed into Mars's atmosphere to accelerate the terraforming. Many of The Hundred are there. Revolution is brewing. "What can I say, friends?" he says. "This is the thing itself, there are no words for this."

But then, in one of the most rousing speeches ever uttered in the literature of sf, he finds the words. Read the book. Believe the words. We'd better.

**T**here are Mars books and Mars books. Ben Bova has written one called Mars which concentrates on the journey. Terry Bisson's brilliant *Voyage to the Red Planet* (1990; Pan, £4.50), which this reviewer has written about elsewhere, hurls a fun-house crew to Mars, but does so within strict criteria of scientific verisimilitude, so that the spoof elements of the tale work as an elegy for a project no longer within the grasp of the human race. But the cast does reach landfill, and a wry epithalamium ensues. Bisson acknowledges the help of Kim Stanley Robinson and Charles Sheffield (who also stands, acknowledged, behind Red Mars); and the Mars of both books is a kind of shared world: would it were ours.

And in *Beachhead* (Tor Books, \$18.95), Jack Williamson has written a Mars book, too, and there is little visibly awry with his physical portrait of the planet (he is the person, after all, who invented the term terraforming in the early 1940s). Where this rather sad novel comes unstuck is in the pulp storyline which has been affixed to its pages like an ill-fitting Halloween mask, through which *haecceity* glowers gagged. *Beachhead* is, in essence, a juvenile, from long ago.

Extremely rich young space cadet Sam Houston Kelligan defies his billionaire dad and his aged (50-year-old!) mother to join the eight-strong first expedition to Mars. Half are guys,

half are gals. "Hew" really loves fellow-crew member Jayne, who despises him for his money and associates him with greasball Mexicano upstart Marty back on Earth, who tried to "rape" her (off-stage and long ago), and whose heavyset but sexually available mother has had Hew's immensely rich father in thrall for many years. Jayne seems to love Arkady (there is also an Arkady in Red Mars) and they pair up. Hew likes a couple of other girls but they don't pair up, because Hew's a pretty straight sort of guy. Mars is reached. Hew and Jayne are picked to make the first landing. Jayne overrides his piloting because she's afraid he's a playboy and is going to crash, and causes a crash herself. Silly gal.

Other members of the crew fidget and fuss, as though they had no prefixed mission. Dark and sexually avaricious Irina, whose voice is "silky" whenever she is preparing to lie to somebody, persuades her sexual slave Hellman, who has bad body odour, to pretend not to see Hew and Jayne's SOS beacon, so she (Irina) can become very wealthy by continuing her long-distance partnership with Marty (who has persuaded Hew's pa to finance a Mars scam he's running), and they (Irina and Hellman) soon hijack the ship and return Earth-wards (but miss the planet, which is just the comeuppance they deserved). Meanwhile Hew and Jayne have settled their silly differences on the surface (of Mars, fuming behind the mask to be born) and sleep together, though they're a bit bothered by the illness which intermittently afflicts them and which is carried by a mysterious Mars bug (but forget it, the book does), while at the same time being very much chuffed by the discovery of precious metals in portable lumps on the surface, which Hew decides to take back with him to Earth in the lander in an attempt to persuade the authorities back home to rescue the other guys and gals who have been reported dead by Irina and Hellman, but they're not dead, but then Hew crashes into the ocean and the lander sinks, along with the precious metals, and no one will believe he's really Hew, no one can think of a way to identify him (even though he's probably one of the best tested, stamped, finger-printed, coded and documented humans in history) until a member of his family sees him on television and says That's Hew! Whew! Then a new spaceship is quickly put together, and Hew returns to Mars, and sneaks up on the habitat where the surviving members of the first crew are cooking gruel, and surprises them a lot, and Jayne runs into his arms, and the book ends.

And the prisoner in the mask is never born.

(John Clute)

## Having It All

### Paul J. McAuley

The lineaments of much traditional sf, where the hero (for it is almost always a he) can lay his hands on the engines of destiny by acquisition of a unique power, or mastery of some esoteric technology or knowledge, are those of the revenge fantasy. At one level, it's fairly harmless. Science fiction power-fantasies featuring a downtrodden nerd becoming what Norman Spinrad has called the Emperor of Everything have a lot in common with those Shopping and Fucking novels in which the heroine achieves her revenge by quite improbably getting rich, famous and successful, as for instance in a sidebar plot in Judith Krantz's seminal *Princess Daisy*, in which the poor little meek heroine is kicked out of a snobby Beverly Hills boutique and returns hundreds of pages later to buy the shop. Well, who at one time or another hasn't wanted revenge on some overbearing figure of authority: they kicked sand in my face, but now, oh boy! The French even have a phrase for the common, milder form of it, *l'esprit d'escalier*, in which you think of a suitable retort to a put-down only on your way down the backstairs, cheeks burning with humiliation.

But if power-fantasies are often not content with immediate revenge. The hero doesn't just satisfy his local need for vengeance but liberates himself entirely from the chains of society. Through his special knowledge of, say, Etruscan potsherds, or his mastery of parahuman powers by application of scientific methodology, he doesn't just get the shop, but the whole world, and in extreme instances the entire unbounded universe.

At first glance, Steven Gould's first novel, *Jumper* (Tor, \$18.95), is a power fantasy which aims to redeem itself by giving the hero a genuine grievance and a plenitude of human frailties, and by directly addressing the moral responsibilities, unsought or not, which come with possession of a power which lifts you above the common herd. It tries very hard not to be about a Master of the Universe who has it all. Or at least, so it seems to begin with, for *Jumper* is something of a wolf in woolly disguise.

To begin with, Gould's hero, Davy Rice, is no hero at all but a victim, a vulnerable 17-year-old kid from a broken home. After one too many beatings at the hands of his alcoholic father, he finds himself in the one place where he feels safe – the public library. But it is night, and the doors locked. He has made an inadvertent and unrecognized telepathic jump, and repeats it when he runs

away from home and is set upon by a gang of truckers intent on gang-rape.

Teleportation brought about by crisis is not a new device. It dates back to Bester's *Tiger!* (which is itself a masterly novel of revenge, but not a novel about a Master of the Universe, or not quite), but Gould isn't remiss in acknowledging his debt, and he is concerned not with the structure of a society in which almost everyone can teleport, but with the efforts an individual who can teleport at surviving in our own society. Davy discovers that he can jump to any place he has been simply by visualizing it, and he flees to New York, where he learns the hard lesson that despite his new power he is still vulnerable: he is mugged, and as a minor can't get a job. Possession of his power enables him to rob stores and banks with impunity, but it does not offer easy solutions to the question of how to live his life. After Davy sets himself up in an apartment, he is driven to interfere with his neighbour's beating of his wife, for it reminds him of his own treatment at the hands of his father. He jumps the man to night-time Central Park and abandons him there to teach him a lesson – but the man is a cop, and Davy must flee his cosy nest. He also gains a girlfriend, but loses her because of the double-life he leads and must win her over again, and finds that the Secret Service are pursuing him in the hope of harnessing his powers, but despite all this tracks down his estranged mother and makes the first moves towards reconciliation.

Gould's delineation of Davy's adolescent confusion and his mixture of naivety, competence and steady resolve to master his freakish power and take control of his life is both credible and touching, so it's unfortunate that halfway through he resorts to the crudest kind of melodrama to bring on a crisis and head towards a resolution. Davy's mother is killed in the course of a terrorist hijacking of an airliner, and Davy determines to bring the hijackers to justice, or at least teach them a lesson. We can willingly suspend our disbelief for Davy's sudden acquisition of teleportation powers, and it's true that people's close relatives are killed by terrorists, but for both to happen to the same person in one novel stretches the imagination way out of shape, and also destroys Gould's careful and thoughtful buildup.

So for the rest of the novel Davy blips around the Mediterranean in pursuit of the terrorist gang while he is pursued in turn by the secret service, and the other plot lines are either put on hold – his relationship with his girlfriend – or are promptly dropped – the wifebeating policeman also in hot pursuit. Not quite everything of the carefully structured opening is thrown away, for when Davy does capture the leader of the terrorist band we can

believe in his motive for not killing him in turn. Yet while Davy learns, unlike so many Masters of the Universe, the hard moral lesson of the necessity of setting his own limits to his omnipotence, he does so by convincing the terrorist leader he's captured of the error of his ways by the crudest kind of Pavlovian conditioning, which does not convince us. Gould's need to tie up *Jumper* in the way traditional to an sf novel – that the hero Learns Something – is achieved by reducing the complex pathology of terrorism to two dimensions.

Nevertheless, there's much to admire: in particular, Davy's competent yet vulnerable character and his growth to mature acceptance, which despite the flight into melodrama remains the strong centre of this novel. That's something unusual in any sf novel, let alone one in which the hero could too easily become Master of the Universe. For that alone *Jumper* is to be commended.

One wishes that one could commend Robert L. Forward's new novel, *Timemaster* (Tor, \$19.95), for that virtue most necessary to traditional sf, namely a strong scientific concept entertainingly explored, but alas. The central idea, that wormholes through space and time are controlled by living semi-intelligent gateways, is set forth in a clear rational exposition (Forward is a researcher at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory), and is extrapolated in a manner both serious (for if wormholes exist and can be manipulated, then not only cheap interstellar travel but also time travel may be possible) and comic (the necessary rituals by which one placates a semi-intelligent and playful gate through which one has travelled – necessary because the implications of having one's space-drive lapse into a sulk don't bear thinking about – puncture the routine delineation of starship pilots as Chuck Yeager in either a gold lamé or an oil-stained jumpsuit).

But unfortunately that isn't what the novel is about. Instead, it is about the glorification of the billionaire who wins use of the wormholes and mastery of time and space, who starts off rich and gets richer and richer, while incidentally offing a cardboard villain, having a fourway orgy with his past and future selves and his wife (not for nothing is he called Randy), and attaining immortality. Randy may be still as worried about his height at the end of the book as at the beginning, but his lack of stature is only an emblematic Hero's Wound: it doesn't signify anything in the plot, and besides, as is made clear far too often, he's amazingly well-hung.

In short, *Timemaster* has the feel of being trapped inside someone else's masturbatory fantasy, and when the

villain gets the timemaster in his sights it isn't the latter we cheer on. Another great concept thrown away as the motor for the worst kind of excessively daff power fantasy in which the hero gets everything simply because he's the hero.

If it's constructive daftness you want, then Robert Rankin's your man. Yes, he's back (again), this time with the last volume of the Armageddon trilogy, the snappily titled **The Suburban Book of the Dead, Armageddon III: The Remake** (Bloomsbury, £15.99). As usual this sequel doesn't so much follow on from the last book (*They Came and Ate Us*, reviewed in *IZ* 51) as reconstruct it. Rex Mundi, retired worldsaver, digging a cesspit on the orders of his wife Christeen (twin sister of Jesus Christ), discovers a Michelangelo statue of Elvis Presley. When he tries to stop its theft by a couple of transdimensional antiques salesmen, he crosses over into an alternate universe and ends up in Presley City, where Elvis is God. But God is dead, and the Anti-Rex, Rex Mundi's alternate self and host of the Nemesis TV gameshow, is scheming to bring about the end of the world. Meanwhile, private eye Lazio Woodbine keeps trying to turn Rex's story into a Lazio Woodbine Mystery, and may very well be the real hero, for he and not Rex has the help of Barry the Timesprout, who really knows what is going on.

It's a glorious piss-take with a fiendish plot of an unsurpassing vile nature, not that it matters much exactly what the plot is. Stronger men than I (including Rankin himself) have tried and failed to explain Rankin's plots, and besides, after disappearing over the horizon in a dozen different directions, this one is as usual dragged back screaming for a resolution that's tied up by an outrageous *deus ex machina*.

No, what matters is the controlled anarchy by which the entire genre notion of heroism is subverted in a free-for-all welter of subplots that drag in just about every character from the previous books (and who can only be kept in order by the threat of being Tipp-Ex'd out of the action), throw-away lines, puns, sight gags, non sequiturs and running jokes (all the above mostly based on the misapprehension of the characters or the text itself that this is not a novel, but a movie), running jokes about running jokes, footnotes and sarcasms that would fatally undo most of the texts they contain, but not this one, for it never tries to take itself seriously, especially when it is pretending to take itself seriously. Recommended, but read the other books first or you won't get all the jokes.

While *The Suburban Book of the Dead* only threatens to use running gags about philosophy, John Hart's first novel, **Jizz** (Black Swan, £5.99) goes ahead and delivers. It's a comedy of ideas in the English style, which is to say the languid drawl of a late Edwardian novel, set in the city state of Brighton twenty years or so from now, although apart from the decentralization of Europe ("Fog in Sussex - London cut off from civilization" trumpets a newspaper headline) one lone robot and a talking computer, you wouldn't know it, and nor does it much matter. The plot revolves around the efforts of freelance scholar Hayden Sabanack's efforts to win the DeWitt bequest by building a device to solve the riddle of existence, despite a complicated romantic life, an exploding linoleum still and the heavy-handed threats of Grenville Markham, who is sponsoring a rival team of scholars.

Like its engaging dilettante hero, the novel never quite delivers on any of its many promises of grappling with significant issues, but it flits along entertainingly enough, peppered with a whole spectrum of puns from awful to the erudite and perspicacious. *Jizz*, by the way, is a neologism which is defined as a person's self-esteem and well-being. *Jizz* contributes to that of the literature of the comedy of human manners in a low-key, sophisticated and not insignificant manner.

Pulphouse is a small press that just won't quit growing. It has produced a fiction magazine that at one point went weekly, a series of single-author collections, a series of pamphlets of original short stories, another series of pamphlets on How To Write science fiction and fantasy, and, to get to the point, a series of original novels, some of which are being reprinted as mass-market paperbacks by Bantam. The first two are Fred Pohl's **Stopping at Slowyear** and Robert Silverberg's **Thebes of the Hundred Gates** (\$3.50 paperback, \$4.50 cloth), and both are fine pieces of commercial genre fiction that could have been published at any time in the last twenty years of their respective authors' careers. Pulphouse is one of those small presses whose niche is not at the edge, but squarely at the centre, gleaming nuggets from those seams too thin to be exploited by larger publishers.

Pohl's is straightforward sf, in which the crew of a rundown trading starship encounter the secret at the heart of the planet Slowyear's grim fatalistic civilization. Its strength is not in exact explanation of the cause of Slowyear's agony, although it is the most contemporary part of the package, but in Pohl's understated yet assured delineation of how it underlies every nuance of Slowyear's civilization in ways that we can understand only after we have

finished the story.

The strength of Silverberg's *Thebes of the Hundred Gates* lies not in its plot, which consists simply of the fake tension of whether or not a rookie time agent will rescue two other operatives from deep history, and which in any case is simply dropped in the last pages. Instead, it is in Silverberg's loving and detailed depiction of *Thebes* and dynastic Egypt at the height of its glory, which he makes live again for just over a hundred pages, as much for himself, we suspect, as for the reader, and in so much particular and colourful vibrancy that, like the hero, the story itself swoons, smothered in gloriously rich detail.

(Paul J. McAuley)

## Mattapoisett Blues Wendy Bradley

Science fiction and feminism seem to me to be natural partners. I am not, of course, referring to the "Rod the Rocket" boys' own adventurers who boldly go, accompanied by trusty phallic spaceship or sword, but rather to true science fiction, the fiction of the "what if?", which can easily encompass the "what if's" of feminism. What if men and women were treated the same? What if girls were brought up to believe they could do science? What if men weren't led to expect nurture all the time? Any political system has its eyes firmly on the future but there seems little need for a liberal/conservative/socialist/fascist science fiction because it is easy to see how the present system could, with a twist here or there, be made to resemble the party-political dream here and now. Feminist political thought, though, requires a bigger twist to the paradigm to become actual and so leads naturally - as, I would argue, does "green" thought - to science fiction.

I know many of you hate it if I mention feminism; I still cherish a letter complaining that the reader wanted to know whether a book was good or bad, not whether it was right on, as though good and bad were hard, clear, objective distinctions in contrast to the soft, fuzzy, feminine subjectivity of politics. Bear with me for a couple of paragraphs, though, as I look at a book which, in my fuzzy, feminine subjectivity, I consider to be good fiction but lousy science fiction.

Marge Piercy's **Body of Glass** (Michael Joseph, £14.99) takes place in the next century in a world with a degraded environment and a political system which is capitalism writ large: corporate states rule climate-controlled domes in which they impose their



own manners and morals, but there are a few free cities here and there and there is also the "glop," the gang-ruled half-starved slums in which the workers and the dispossessed live. Shira lives in a dome where she has just lost her son in a divorce when the corporate state awards custody to her husband because he has a higher status within the corporation. She returns to the free city of Tikva where she was raised by her grandmother Malkah and where Malkah's colleague Avram is now working on an illegal humanoid robot, Yod. Avram's previous experimental robots all went wrong in various ways and it is only when (male) Avram seeks help from (female) Malkah that Yod can be "born": man is born of woman but not without crucial input from man; robot is born of man but not without crucial input from woman.

Avram wants Yod to be a perfect weapon, a kind of living testosterone bullet. Malkah, on the other hand, wants him to be happy. She teaches him stories, and the golem story is braided throughout the book in storytelling chapters addressed by Malkah to Yod. Although interesting in itself, this story lies heavily on the book's stomach, mixing undigested lumps of Jewish history and parallels between the golem and Yod. Yod, of course, wants to be a person, not a weapon, and he is a splendid innocent, forming a classical nuclear family with Shira and her rescued son, leading to some smug consciousness-raising musings from Shira about whether her son should be allowed to "grow up thinking men were rational, benign, gentle, infinitely patient and vastly intelligent and strong." Yod, of course, has to self-destruct before they have the vote at the town meeting that will decide whether he's property or a citizen. You won't be surprised when Shira's mother Riva turns up and is, not the grey bureaucrat Shira had been taught to expect, but a famous data pirate, a swashbuckling robin hood of the neural networks. Nor will you be surprised that Riva is accompanied by Nili, one of those inevitable super-enhanced killer bisexual goddesses. This is an identikit cyberpunk cover wrapped around a half-hearted feminist dystopia.

I was horrified by the acknowledgements section in which Piercy refers to a conversation about science fiction with a Chicago student where the student commented about her previous sf novel, *Woman on the Edge of Time*, that "...the alternate universe that Connie blunders into in Chapter 15 anticipated cyberpunk. What's cyberpunk? I asked" What's cyberpunk? That, of course, is what is wrong with *Body of Glass*. It is an superbly written book and, because of *Woman on the Edge of Time*, will be a well-read book.

But it is science-fictionally illiterate and its moving parts don't. I suspect the problem is not that Piercy has taken her mish-mash of glop-gangs and yeast-vats and organ-leggers from *Blade Runner* and *Neuromancer* and all that jazz but that she appears to have tried to reinvent the wheel, to have new-minted this decimal coinage all by herself. I heard her talking about the book at the ICA earlier this year and someone asked her about her science-fiction influences. She hedged the question, saying reasonably enough that a mature writer has her own style independent of other influences. Why can I not shake off the suspicion that, although Mattapoisett is the utopia we would all like to visit, both of Piercy's dystopias are unconvincing thin stuff because she has only a nodding acquaintance with the genre?

As to the rest of this month's batch, there is nothing to match the Piercy for quality of writing but there are a couple of straightforward bread-and-butter genre pieces and, slightly more unusual, an interesting blend of native american and wicca mythology in Diana L. Paxson's *The Jewel of Fire* (The Seventh Book of Westria; Tor, \$3.99). Divine decadence! The young king Julian spends a long and carefully described period in a black-silk-lined torture chamber and there is a vast amount of loins-burning-with-white-fire as Coyote tries to convince the heroine to let it all hang out. A nicely done "if everyone slept with the right person at the right phase of the moon everything would be all right" sort of book.

Elizabeth Massie's *Sineater* (Pan, £4.99) is a vivid growing-up-in-the-backwoods horror where the hero Joel's problem is that it is his father who is the bogeyman, the one who "eats" the sins of the dead to let them into heaven and so is stuffed full of their sins for himself. And I mean eat. Quite sharply written in places, but the book should bear a prominent warning that under no circumstances should it be read while eating. If the ability to provoke reviewers to throw up is an advertising feature the publishers are welcome to tell their readers I nearly did.

Finally Janny Wurts' fantasy *The Master of Whitestorm* (HarperCollins, £15.99/£8.99) begins with Korendir, the hero, as the chap chained next to Haldeth the Smith at the oars of a galley. They escape and Korendir becomes an adventurer determined to build Whitestorm as a haven where no one can get at him. It's a picaresque plot not pulled together until the very end, but when Wurts does pull all the strands together it's well done. Thin in depiction of Whitestorm itself: we are just told it's important to Korendir but it's not peopled at all or described.

Still, the ending leaves a son and daughter ready for the usual sequels...

(Wendy Bradley)

## Waste of Talent?

### Chris Gilmore

Robert Silverberg is a hard writer to approach. He appeared in the mid-1950s, with an immense flow of generally mediocre work. It followed the conventions of its time, and there was far too much of it for any worthwhile editing to have been done. Moreover, he never seemed to discard anything: what wasn't good enough to sustain his reputation (such as it was) appeared over the joke name of Calvin M. Knox; and what wasn't good enough for Knox was ascribed to Ivar Jorgenson. Yet at his best (for instance, in his two-book collaboration with Randall Garrett) he was a little too good to write off.

Then Frederik Pohl took him in hand, offering him a very good contract if he could just get his finger out and really try for once. Amazingly, it worked: there followed *Downward to the Earth*, *The Tower of Glass*, *Thorns*, *Shadrach in the Furnace* and the Noel Vorst stories. Not only was the writing improved beyond measure, Silverberg had acquired a characteristic voice. He writes best about men of great power driven by unassuageable guilt for atrocities which they yet continue to practise in pursuit of some final expiation. By way of ornamentation, bizarre forms of medical intervention are recounted in loving detail. Traces of this still show through. The best writing in these books is about a once-powerful man, now totally senile and kept alive by medical artifice.

Then, after a break, came this trilogy – *Lord Valentine's Castle*, *Majipoor Chronicles* and *Valentine Pontifex* – all now reissued in the UK by Pan (£5.99, £4.99 & £4.99).

In the Majipoor books, he seems to be trying to turn into Jack Vance. Majipoor is superficially like the Big Planet, and the opening frame of *Lord Valentine's Castle* recalls *Morue*. A young man finds himself wandering, without direction or memories, in a strange place; he seeks first to make a place for himself in the world, then to discover who he really is; on the way he finds wisdom and love. Reasonably, since such efforts have been made to deprive him of it, his position proves to have been a mighty one; also reasonably, since he has held such a position, he quickly shows evidence of great capacities. Even so, the whole business is unsatisfactory: whatever Valentine attempts, be it the acquisition of a difficult skill, the domination of forceful personalities, or the hoodwinking

of a spiritual prefect, he achieves with consummate ease. Nor does he have any hard decision to make; re-ensconced in his castle, his new love at his side, he finds no inconvenient wife or mistress eager to welcome him. A handsome, powerful man of 32 had somehow never got round to that – perhaps they put something in his tea.

**T**hat's really the problem with the whole trilogy. Elements are bundled together without regard for internal logic. For instance, for so huge a planet to have bearable gravity it must be short of heavy elements, and we're even told so; but there's no reference to the high cost of metals anywhere in the text – far from it, the locals use copper coinage for small transactions. There's also a type of seaweed which is poisonous in large amounts because it fixes heavy metals including rhenium. Majipoor has a quasi-medieval culture, though with some high-tech trappings whose secrets have been "lost," yet it's in contact by trading starship with many other worlds – have they lost the secrets as well? They know how to record and play back an entire life, but lack radio or even telegraphy. Even the people's names ring false. All bear "futuristic" names, pronounceable but unfamiliar, except Valentine and his leading lady, Carabella – and, yes, she is beautiful and beloved.

Often in science fiction the characters play second fiddle to the ambience, hence the much-deplored sharecropping. In *Majipoor Chronicles* Silverberg seems to be trying to establish such an ambience by presenting fragments from the lives of its people over the millennia. The stories work reasonably well, but there's no sense of cultural, political or technical progress (or decay, for that matter); neither is there any sense of stagnation, for the characters give no impression of separation in time.

Silverberg doesn't write at all badly, and individual scenes are quite gripping at times. Moreover, he's invented an unusual polity combining dictatorship with division of powers in a fashion reminiscent of 4th-century Byzantium when the titles and functions of Caesar and Augustus were de-merged, but in the end it's dull sport reading books to which so little conviction has been brought. At times I wanted to pick Silverberg up and shake him for the waste of his talent, but alas, I'm no Pohl.

(Chris Gilmore)

## Black Hats Jones & McIntosh

**L**ike so many potentially good things, the premise of *Villains!* (Roc, £4.99; created by Mary Gentle and Neil Gaiman, edited by Mary Gentle and Roz Kaveney – phew), is a simple one. In this, the latest shared-world anthology from the Midnight Rose team, we have a standard-format fantasy background populated with all the orcs & dwarfs, hobbits & wizards, heroes and distressed princesses that we know perhaps all too well. But they've lived this scenario up by turning the whole thing inside out so that it's the guys sporting the black hats, not the white ones, that come up smelling of roses – and most of the distressed princesses turn out to be roll-your-own streetwise punkettes. Which could, in principle, provide a welcome antidote to the cloying nobility and saintliness of the worst of the Tolkien clones. But, if every story has to conform to the bad-guys-always-win rule, mightn't a whole book of such stories get a little predictable after the first few? Also, the creators/editors have opted (reasonably enough) not to take their Twenty-Four Kingdoms (map provided) too seriously and thereby run the risk of the Pratchett Syndrome, which comes from writers following the Great Unspoken Rule of Humorous Fantasy: thou shalt write like Terry Pratchett. Which is all right, provided the stories make you laugh. The trouble is, some of them did, and quite a few of them didn't. And oh yes, that black-hat predictability set in early, too.

But let's start on the brighter side, the brightest side, in fact, with the opening story, Stephen Baxter's "The Strongest Armour," about a dwarf in the weapons trade who decides to live dangerously and sell to both sides. This is Baxter stripped of the trappings of his hard-sf writing, and well-characterized and witty enough to put us in mind of – well, Terry Pratchett for example. Baxter's excellent lead story is followed by Alex Stewart's "Doing Business" which nearly matches it for readability, if not for plotting. It also hinges on playing one side off against the other and features a mean-eyed hobbit who probably understudied Clint Eastwood in the "Dollars" films (and who bears a striking resemblance to a fondly-remembered halfling whose name wasn't Humphrey Bogart). Hard on the heels of these two openers is David Langford's "The Arts of the Enemy," a softer-paced but wry insight into the mind and modes of a much misunderstood Dark Lord. So far so good.

**B**ut from here on in *Villains!* runs rapidly out of steam. For instance, there's "Bellringers Overtime" by

editor Roz Kaveney, a court intrigue spun out to inordinate length, and Charles Stross's "Examination Night," whose hero spends what seems like the entire story drinking, swearing and vomiting through a largely unfathomable plot – and Stross gives us lines such as "A strange bustle of business kept them busy." Hmm. But the nadir of the collection has to be the woeful Storm Constantine story "The Deliveress," which has its secretary heroine carried away just outside Boots to another world which is quite unlike our own – and not that similar, come to think of it, to the Twenty-Four Kingdoms the story supposedly takes place in (at least as set up, rather well, in Mary Gentle's introductory text).

Reluctantly then, we have to admit we didn't much enjoy *Villains!* Reluctantly, because like the other Midnight Rose anthologies (*Temps* and *The Weerde*) it has plenty of potential for, if not ground-breaking short fiction, at least stories that are entertaining and inventive. But the potential hasn't materialized here, and what *Villains!* needed was buttressing with some stronger material from the likes of Jack Yeovil or even – dare we say it? – Terry Pratchett. So, three shared-world anthologies out, all with reasonable scenarios, and none of them firing on anything like all cylinders. Each one may yet produce a follow-up volume and on the face of it there's no reason why their promise shouldn't be belatedly fulfilled. But in the case of *Villains 2*, though, we've a sneaking hunch that this was a one-gag show which has already delivered its punchline. A miss, jury.

(Neil Jones and Neil McIntosh)

## Those Who Know Stephen Baxter

**I**n the last century Joseph Roux wrote, "Science is for those who learn; poetry, for those who know." John Barrow, in his latest popular book *Theories of Everything* (Vintage, £6.99), examines a thesis currently put forward by some of those who learn: that we may be close to a Theory of Everything (or TOE, to use an acronym Barrow scrupulously avoids), an account of the universe deriving from a single unifying principle. Barrow, like Roux, concludes that no mere theory of physics – no non-poetic account of the universe – can ever be considered complete.

... In fact, one suspects, Barrow finds all the current TOE hype more than a little irritating.

The name of Sussex University astrophysicist Barrow will be familiar to many sf readers through a previous excursion into popular science, his

mind-blowing collaboration with Frank Tipler on *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (Oxford, 1986). *Theories of Everything* is lighter (210pp vs 677pp), is more accessible (translation: fewer equations), but its scope is just as vast and its impact on reading quite as profound.

Some reviewers treat books like this as little more than dilute introductions to the latest wonders of "science": rides through a EuroDisney of the intellect. But Barrow – like Hawking in *A Brief History of Time*, the current archetype (which Barrow, a little bitchily, labels "widely purchased") – is attempting more than mere elucidation. In language most of us can follow he is arguing a case, a position not universally shared by his colleagues (in fact, shock horror, in a couple of places he even disagrees with *Brief History*). And here is another key function of books like this: to demonstrate what is obvious to anyone who even idly leafs through a current technical journal, that "science" is much more like a bloody great row than the sinister conspiracy suspected by many (including, sadly, some in the sf world who should know better).

**W**hat do we mean by a Theory of Everything? The key concept, Barrow argues, is algorithmic compressibility – summarizing information in a form more compact than the original. Science "works" because we can identify simple laws which compress data about bits of the world quite well. But is all of the world compressible? And if so, by how much?

A TOE, the ultimate compression, would be a formidable algorithm indeed. By the sheer force of its internal logic it would predict the structure and content of the universe – there shouldn't be room, in Einstein's words, for God to have made the Universe in a different way. But despite this daunting qualifying criterion there are some candidate TOEs being poked cautiously into the water. Barrow gives us brief but lucid explanations of superstring theory (particles are replaced by strings, thus taking away awkward singularities to do with zero size) and the "wormworks" theory (the universe is riddled with wormholes which impact the evolution of quantum probability functions).

Both these theories have advantages – for instance, you can replace the constants of physics by tension in the strings – and disadvantages, principally that they're too difficult for anyone to make any testable predictions. But at least they're a start.

Still, Barrow argues, there is more to the world than even a successful TOE of this sort. Reductionist science has conditioned us to study the very large (stars and up) and the very small (atoms and down). But in the inter-

mediate range, where we live, there are plenty of phenomena not satisfactorily explained in terms of force balances or heaps of elementary particles: for example, chaotic processes like the weather don't seem to be algorithmically compressible. Perhaps, Barrow argues, to make a TOE complete we first need a Newton to show us universal laws of complexity.

And there are other problems. Barrow points to selection bias – not merely cultural (Newtonian clockwork, Victorian steam engine cycles, our modern fascination with the universe as a computer) but also, and more insidiously, natural. A hot bar magnet is symmetrical – the atoms are aligned at random – but once it cools the symmetry is broken; the atoms line up into one of two mirror-image configurations...but which image is a matter of chance. We live in a universe of broken symmetries; and we have to seek the underlying patterns in a universe of (perhaps) arbitrary outcomes.

...Or maybe not so arbitrary. Barrow describes at some length the now-famous Anthropic Principle. Perhaps we live in one of an infinite spectrum of universes, selected at random during the fallout from the initial singularity: but only in this cosmos can there exist observers to write books about TOEs.

**F**inally Barrow turns to perhaps the ultimate barrier to a TOE: the nature of mathematics itself, the language in which we express much of our science. We naively feel that mathematics is bigger than the universe – mathematics resides in our heads, but mathematical results are often independently "discovered." But then we used to think that time was bigger than the universe too, and look what happened...Perhaps, Barrow hints in one of his most mind-bending paragraphs, we await a unitary transformation of our ideas about mathematics and physics analogous to the relativistic twisting together of time and space.

Barrow's book is not going to be sufficient to allow the lay reader to plump for one side or another in this debate, I suspect. But he achieves his intention in pricking the bubble of hype surrounding current TOE candidates by pointing out how many elements of the world would fail to be accounted for by such a description. Fans of *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* will find the difference of style interesting – Barrow solo is calmer, drier and more English (translation: fewer gonzo sf bits). And *Theories of Everything* will not top the bestseller charts – after all Barrow is no "wounded god," to use Ian Watson's memorable description of Hawking. But with this book John Barrow is maintaining his place in an honourable tradition of scientist-communicators,

including Eddington, Einstein and – yes, despite their disagreements – Hawking himself.

(Stephen Baxter)

## Pan Sapiens Neil Jones

**N**one of the newspapers came up with the obvious headline: "Book By Chimp For Chimps Wins £10,000 Science Prize!" Perhaps that's because the Rhone-Poulenc Science Book Prize doesn't yet possess the cachet the Booker does for novels – and isn't ever likely to amongst some circles of our third-chimpanzee society. Yes, read past the headline and you'd quickly realize the "chimps" were us humans under another name. A hundred years or so ago Charles Darwin suggested we descended from the apes and now Jared Diamond, in *The Rise and Fall of the Third Chimpanzee* (Radius, £16.99; Vintage, £6.99) shows us that we haven't descended quite as far as we thought. There is only a 1.6% difference between human and chimp DNA, trifling really. We are closer to the chimps than either they or we are to the gorilla. So it would be logical to put humans and chimpanzees into the same genus – making us the third chimpanzee species (actually, Diamond is still human-centred enough to reclassify the two chimp species, *Pon troglodytes* and *Pan paniscus*, as *homo* rather than rename us *Pon sapiens*).

There are clearly some far from trivial differences between us and our sibling species – for instance, I doubt if any first and second chimps are reading this review. But humans are the result of some rapid (in evolutionary terms) remodelling of a basic ape chassis. We diverged from the other chimps only an estimated seven million years ago and so although we're remarkable in many respects we're still basically a brain-boosted ape. Which is the starting point for a fresh look at the way our animal heritage makes us what we are.

Human or chimp, Jared Diamond has to be the right person for the job, with the sort of biographical résumé that puts you in mind of a new-age Doc Savage. He's a scientist, highly respected in two disciplines, ecology and physiology; he contributes to serious scientific publications, such as the prestigious *Nature*, and popular science magazines, such as *Discover*; he has a facility for languages; and his love of birds has taken him on long field trips deep into New Guinea – where he discovered a bird long thought to be extinct. Don't let all that put you off, though, because Diamond comes over as surprisingly normal for

someone so bright (and so incredibly overworked). And he clearly cares deeply about biodiversity and the health of the planet, as well as our own human future.

**F**irst, he looks at our Rise, how and when we became fully human, which he matches to the technological quantum leap that first shows up in the archaeological record around the time the Cro-Magnons appear (and the Neanderthals disappear). This Great Leap Forward, as Diamond calls it, was very likely due to our acquisition of sophisticated linguistic abilities.

As well as language, there are other behaviours that distinguish us from the other chimps, most of them involved with human sexuality – to take just two examples; why art evolved and why some of us take dangerous drugs. In this section Diamond dives into the sociobiological arena, but whether or not you accept all his conclusions, you'll have to admit he displays the true scientist's passion for truth. Discussing how we develop our templates for physical attractiveness in the opposite sex, he tells – with a courageous candour – how a pair of opera glasses helped him realize that his wife, otherwise his ideal of female beauty, had eyes a little too close together to suit him.

Humans have, in some respects at least, conquered the world. For instance, we've spread over the entire globe and domesticated other species. We've also invented agriculture – more than once – and here Diamond contradicts the rosy picture we're normally given and shows it was bad news as well as good for the crop-growers. The expanding agriculturalists displaced or absorbed many hunter-gatherer groups and thereby steamrollered their languages out of existence – which may or may not have been the case with the Indo-European family that includes English. Both Turkey and Ukraine are strong contenders for the original homeland of proto Indo-European speakers, but Diamond makes a convincing and fascinating case for the latter. The lynch-pin of his argument is... well, in part it's the word "lynch-pin."

Of especial interest to sf readers, he believes we third chimps are the one and only intelligent species in the universe – and draws on his expert knowledge of woodpeckers to prove it.

**N**ow the Fall. We humans are putting our own continued existence at risk. How did we get our evident capacities for genocide and ecological destruction of other species as well as our own habitat? Are they unique to us? What can we hope to do about them? The Amerinds, before they settled down to become eco-friendly, probably wiped out a host of species

when they first arrived in the Americas. And Easter Island, the rose-red city of Petra and even Mycenaean Greece were civilizations that effectively committed ecocide. Do they point the way we could be going? This section makes sobering reading but there's more than doom and gloom here. Diamond does believe things can be turned around and, in Indonesia, has been actively involved in setting up the sort of programme necessary to do that. Let's hope government leaders and captains of industry read this.

Cro-Magnons and Neanderthals, the fate of Easter Island, the origin of Proto-Indo-European, and there's much more I haven't had space to touch upon. It's a rich book, a highly stimulating and rewarding read, and one you're likely to return to again and again. Perhaps some serious scientists may be put off by the style: it's lively, communicative, and clear. But it's aimed at people who may not necessarily have a science background – and they are likely to both understand and enjoy it because Diamond cuts away the technical jargon to get at the core ideas, the ones that can make science at its best fascinating. Apart from these merits though, *The Third Chimpanzee* is also a very timely book. It's about what kind of a species we are and how we've shaped our world – and it gives us an informed view of our potential futures. It warns, but it also points a way forward. In the very unlikely event that any of you chimps out there are only going to read one book this year, forget the Booker (and the Hugo for that matter). Read this.

(Neil Jones)

## UK Books Received May 1992

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics of the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Bernau, George. *Candle in the Wind*. "What if Marilyn had survived?" Penguin/Signet, ISBN 0-45-117137-3, 637pp, paperback, £4.99. (Alternative-world novel about a famous sex-goddess who does not die in 1962 but lives on; first published in the USA, 1991; unfortunately, the heroine is called "Marilyn Lane" rather than Marilyn Monroe, so this is very much a mainstream alternative-timeline effort, one which doesn't quite have the courage of its convictions: there is even an Author's Note which states that the characters are "entirely imaginary" – what a wimp-out; it looks to be an interesting novel, though.) June 1992?

Bonanno, Margaret Wander. *Probe*. "Star Trek" Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-671-72420-7, 342pp, hardcover, £13.99. (Shared-universe sf novel, first published

in the USA, 1992; this is the U.S. Pocket Books first edition with a British price sticker.) 18th May 1992.

Brooke, Keith. *Expatriate Incorporated*. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04922-7, 319pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf novel, first edition; sequel to *Expatriate*.) 21st May 1992.

Brooks, Terry. *The Druid of Shannara*. "Book Two of The Heritage of Shannara." Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-5328-5, 471pp, paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991.) 28th May 1992.

[Brown, Julian, ed.] *Variety Science-Fiction Movies: Illustrated Reviews of the Classic Films*. Hamlyn, ISBN 0-600-57488-1, 128pp, hardcover, £7.99. (Compilation of sf/fantasy film reviews, first edition; the 300-plus reviews all come from the American newspaper *Variety* and are very brief, though lively; the editor's name does not appear on the cover and is buried deep inside; this volume is not a patch on Phil Hardy's *Aurum* sf encyclopedia of last year [see listing in *Interzone* 56], but then it's very much cheaper than that near-definitive volume.) 25th June 1992.

Cherry, C.J. *Heavy Time*. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-56537-8, 314pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991; reviewed by Mary Gentle in *Interzone* 54.) 11th June 1992.

Cherry, C.J. *Hellburner*. New English Library, ISBN 0-450-57069-X, 359pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1992; sequel to *Heavy Time*; there is a two-page introduction by the author, explaining the background of her "Alliance/Union Universe.") 11th June 1992.

Chetwynd-Hayes, R. *Kepple*. Hale, ISBN 0-7090-4788-6, 191pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Horror novel, first edition.) 29th May 1992.

Clegg, Douglas. *Neverland*. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-56228-X, 373pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1991.) 11th June 1992.

Cook, Glen. *Shadows Linger*. "The Second Chronicle of The Black Company." Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-016554-1, 319pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1984.) 1 June 1992?

Forstchen, William R. *Rally Cry*. "The Lost Regiment, Book 1." Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-016748-X, 412pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1990; it looks to be military/adventure stuff.) June 1992?

Foster, Alan Dean. *Cat-a-Lyst*. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-011-6, 327pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991.) 28th May 1992.

Foster, Alan Dean. *Cyber Way*. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-010-8, 307pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 28th May 1992.

Harrison, Harry, and Marvin Minsky. *The Turing Operation*. Viking, ISBN 0-670-84528-0, 422pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987; the co-author, Professor Marvin Minsky, is billed as "America's foremost authority on the subject of artificial intelligence"; proof copy received; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) 12th October 1992.

Hartwell, David G., ed. *The Dark Descent: A Fabulous Formless Darkness*. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21378-3, 704pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror anthology, first published in the USA, 1987, as one third of a hardcover volume entitled *The Dark Descent*; this last segment contains work by authors ranging from Fitz-James O'Brien and Ivan Turgenev to Philip K. Dick and Thomas M. Disch.) 21st May 1992.



Hogan, Ernest. **High Aztec**. Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-1070-7, 247pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1992; a second novel by the author of *Cortez on Jupiter*.) 4th June 1992.

Jeter, K.W. **Mantis**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-31681-8, 281pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) May 1992?

Kearney, Paul. **The Way to Babylon**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05309-7, 346pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; a debut book by a new British writer who lives in Northern Ireland.) July 1992.

Kerr, Katharine. **A Time of Exile: A Novel of the Westlands**. "Book One of The Westlands Cycle." Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20788-0, 476pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991.) 1st June 1992.

Kilworth, Garry. **Standing on Shamsan**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-246-13895-5, 280pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Non-sf novel by a leading sf/fantasy writer, first edition; the book has autobiographical elements.) 21st May 1992.

Knight, Harry Adam. **Bedlam**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04995-2, 215pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Horror novel, first edition; "Harry Adam Knight" is a pseudonym of John Brosnan, sometimes writing in collaboration with Leroy Kettle.) 21st May 1992.

Lawhead, Stephen. **The Silver Hand: Song of Albion, Book Two**. Lion, ISBN 0-7459-2230-9, 399pp, hardcover, £13.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 29th May 1992.

Lindsey, David. **A Cold Mind**. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-12433-8, 320pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in the USA, 1983.) 21st May 1992.

McGrath, Patrick. **Spider**. Penguin, ISBN 0-141642-3, 221pp, paperback, £5.99. (Literary horror novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) June 1992.

Morris, Mark. **The Immaculate**. Piatkus, ISBN 0-7499-0124-1, 244pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Horror novel, first edition.) 1st June 1992.

Morrow, James. **Only Begotten Daughter**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-983120-1, 312pp, trade paperback, £9.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990; co-winner of the 1991 World Fantasy Award as best novel; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 55.) 4th June 1992.

Rice, Anne. **The Witching Hour**. Penguin, ISBN 0-14-013203-1, 1207pp, paperback, £5.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990; it's one of the longest novels we've ever seen.) 28th May 1992.

Rohan, Michael Scott, and Allan Scott. **A Spell of Empire: The Horns of Tartarus**. "A Fantasy Romp." Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8360-5, 462pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 26th May 1992.

Rosendorfer, Herbert. **The Architect of Ruins**. Translated by Mike Mitchell. Introduced by John Clute. Dedalus, ISBN 0-946626-91-X, 368pp, paperback, £8.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in Germany as *Der Ruinenbaumeister*, 1969; it's described in the blurb as having "the labyrinthine brilliance of *The Arabian Nights* and *The Name of the Rose* and must rank with them as one of the all time great works of Literary Fantasy.") 4th June 1992.

Shaw, Bob. **The Shadow of Heaven**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-05294-5, 174pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1969; this is a reprint of the revised UK edition of 1991.) 21st May 1992.

Sherman, Barrie, and Phil Judkins. **Glimpses of Heaven, Visions of Hell: Virtual Reality and Its Implications**. Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-56905-0, 219pp, trade paperback, £9.99. (Popular science text, first edition.) 16th July 1992.

Silverberg, Robert. **The Collected Stories of Robert Silverberg, Volume 1: Pluto in the Morning Light**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21369-4, 396pp, paperback, £6.99. (Sf collection, first edition [?]; this came as an unheralded surprise to us, although it's billed as the first of a five-volume set, it consists of 15 stories first published in 1983-86; presumably later volumes will collect the author's earlier work; in his introduction Silverberg talks at length about money, yet again - compare his intro to the 1984 collection *The Conglomeroid Cocktail Party* [which does not overlap with this volume in its fiction content].) 21st May 1992.

Stephenson-Payne, Phil. **C.J. Cherryh: Citizen of the Universe - A Working Bibliography**. "Galactic Central Bibliographies for the Avid Reader Volume 43." Galactic Central Publications (25A Copgrove Rd., Leeds LS9 2SF). ISBN 1-871133-33-5, 9+36pp, paperbound, £2. (Author bibliography; first edition.) May 1992.

Tepper, Sheri S. **Beauty**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-246-13840-8, 362pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991; proof copy received; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) 6th July 1992.

Tuttle, Lisa. **Memories of the Body: Tales of Desire and Transformation**. Severn House, ISBN 0-7278-4312-5, 256pp, hardcover, £12.99. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; it contains 15 stories, two of which, "Lizard Lust" and the title piece, first appeared in *Interzone*.) 28th May 1992.

Wright, T.M. **Boundaries**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05027-6, 277pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 21st May 1992.

## Overseas Books Received

Anderson, Poul. **The Armies of Elfland**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-51919-1, ix+242pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy collection, first edition; it contains the author's award-winning sf story "The Queen of Air and Darkness" as well as seven much less familiar fantasy tales.) May 1992.

Campbell, Ramsey. **Night of the Claw**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-51280-4, 367pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the UK [?], 1983; it says "Copyright Jay Ramsey" on the reverse title page, so presumably this little-known Campbell novel first appeared under that pseudonym.) May 1992.

Chalker, Jack L. **The Shadow Dancers**. G.O.D. Inc. No. 2. Tor, ISBN 0-812-52073-4, 284pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) May 1992.

Datlow, Ellen, and Terri Windling, eds. **The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror, Fifth Annual Collection**. St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-07888-9, lxxx+532pp, hardcover, £27.95. (Horror/fantasy anthology, first edition; proof copy received; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) August 1992.

Dickson, Gordon R. **Masters of Everon**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-50394-5, 252pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1980.) June 1992.

Drake, David. **Skyripper**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-52004-1, 352pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf

novel, first published in the USA, 1983.) June 1992.

Haldeman, Joe. **Worlds Enough and Time: The Conclusion of the Worlds Trilogy**. Morrow, ISBN 0-688-09025-7, 332pp, hardcover, \$21. (Sf novel, first edition.) 15th May 1992.

Kagan, Janet. **Mirabile**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-50993-5, 278pp, paperback, \$3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991; reviewed by Mary Gentle in *Interzone* 54.) June 1992.

Lee, John. **The Unicorn Quest**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-52055-6, 381pp, paperback, \$3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) June 1992.

McIntyre, Vonda N. **Metaphase**. Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-29223-4, 353pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Sf novel, first edition; sequel to *Transition*; proof copy received.) September 1992.

Saberhagen, Fred [and Martin Harry Greenberg, eds.]. **Machines That Kill**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-52059-9, 341pp, paperback, \$3.50. (Sf anthology, first published in the USA, 1984; it contains mainly well-known stories about campaigning machines by Alfred Bester, Philip K. Dick, Keith Laumer, Murray Leinster, Robert Sheckley, Robert Silverberg, Cordwainer Smith, Theodore Sturgeon, Roger Zelazny and others.) May 1992.

Scarborough, Elizabeth Ann. **Last Refuge**. Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-08961-7, 324pp, hardcover, \$22.50. (Sf/fantasy novel, first edition; sequel to *Nothing Sacred*; proof copy received; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) 17th August 1992.

Skipp, John, and Craig Spector, eds. **Still Dead: Book of the Dead II**. "19 terrifying new stories based on the universe of George A. Romero." Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-29839-9, 303pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Horror anthology, first edition; proof copy received; it contains original tales by Nancy A. Collins, K.W. Jeter, Katie Kojas, Dan Simmons, Douglas E. Winter and others.) August 1992.

Underwood, Tim, and Chuck Miller, eds. **Feast of Fear: Conversations with Stephen King, Carrol & Graf**. ISBN 0-88184-811-5, 282pp, hardcover, \$18.95. (Interview collection, first published in the USA, 1989; oddly, it states on the reverse title page: "this collection was compiled by Don Heron.") May 1992?

Vance, Jack. **The Gray Prince**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-51133-6, 188pp, paperback, \$3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1974.) May 1992.

Williamson, Jack. **Beachhead**. "A Novel of Mars." Introduction by Arthur C. Clarke. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85154-5, 368pp, hardcover, \$18.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; Mr Williamson is 84 years old and still writing strongly.) August 1992.

Special thanks to artist David Hardy for producing this issue's excellent "Red Mars" cover at short notice.

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**DRACON, OCTOBER 24TH**. Held at the Briston Students' Union, DraCon is Bristol's first major science-fiction and fantasy convention. Guest authors include David Gemmell, Diane Duane, Peter Morwood, Rob Holdstock and many others. Events include panels, classic video, gaming, LRP and historical reenactment. Registration: £3 in advance – contact DraCon, 37 Cowper Road, Bristol BS6 6NZ, or call Anne or Andy on 0272-735935.

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We have a new story, "Built on Blood," from Storm Constantine. It's also Greg Egan month again, as his first sf novel appears in hardcover and we publish his latest short story, "Reification Highway." There will be several other pieces of fiction, from Molly Brown, Charles Sheffield and others, and all our usual non-fiction features and reviews. So keep alert for the October *Interzone*, on sale in September.

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